

# BARRED PROGRESS: INDIANA PRISON REFORM, 1880-1920

Perry R. Clark

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Master of Arts  
in the Department of History  
Indiana University

May 2008

Accepted by the Faculty of Indiana University, in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Robert G. Barrows, Ph.D., Chair

---

Annie Gilbert Coleman, Ph.D.

Master's Thesis  
Committee

---

Jason M. Kelly, Ph.D.

## **Acknowledgments**

Although my name appears alone on the cover page of this thesis, the final product could not have been achieved without the guidance and assistance of the numerous people involved in the research and writing process. My professors at IUPUI have been the most warm, patient, and student-oriented group of academics I have ever come across. Robert Barrows, my professor and thesis committee chairman, provided countless hours of advice and took patience to an entirely new level as deadlines consistently needed extending. He is a remarkable teacher, inspiring mentor, and just an overall great man. Annie Gilbert Coleman and Jason Kelly, the other two-thirds of my thesis committee, used their creativity and expertise to expand my understanding of history and, in the end, make me love my trade even more. The rest of my professors, colleagues, and friends in the history department at IUPUI have helped more than they will ever realize. I thank John Taylor, Owen York, Maureen Craney, and Nancy Robertson for their conversation and their ability to make the fifth floor of Cavanaugh Hall both more entertaining and more educational. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to the Vicki Casteel, the Indiana State Archives, and the Indiana State Library for retrieving much of primary source material used in this project.

I would not even be in the position to write a thesis without the immeasurable support of my family and friends. My mother and father—Ruth and Rich—have stood by me through thick and thin, and their opinions and words of advice have always been valued above all others. I particularly thank them for their unconditional support for my decision to pursue graduate school, a path that has proved more trying and more rewarding than I ever could have imagined. Steph and Ryan have shown time and time

again why they are the best big sister and brother in the world. Steph and her family constantly took interest in my work and demonstrated the same pride they did when I was a young basketball player for the Forest Park Rangers. Ryan—my brother, role model, and former roommate—contributed numerous valuable resources, including his home, as I continued my work in Indianapolis. I also thank my friends—particularly Kevin, Allen, Robyn, and Mark—as well as my bandmates, for being my second family and keeping me sane with the occasional conversation, drink, or jam session.

Finally, I dedicate these pages to my grandparents—Bob, Millie, Hilda, and Jim—whose love and hard work have given all of their descendents, including myself, the opportunity to follow our dreams. I hope that I can live a life half as rich and full as the ones they have led.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter I	
“She Owes Something”: The Rise of the Modern State Prison System in Indiana .....	4
Chapter II	
Skill and Morality in the Progressive Prison .....	47
Chapter III	
The Significance of the Frontier in Indiana Penology .....	87
Conclusion .....	124
Bibliography .....	127
Curriculum Vitae	

## **Introduction**

On January 9, 1821, the Indiana General Assembly passed a bill authorizing the construction of the state's first prison. Within a century, Indiana's prison system would transform from a small structure in Jeffersonville holding less than twenty inmates into a multi-institutional network holding thousands. Within that transition, ideas concerning the treatment of criminals shifted significantly from a penology focused on punishment, hard labor, and low cost, to a one based on social science, skill-building, education, and public funding. These new ideas were not always sound, however, and often the implementation of those ideas was either distorted or incomplete. In any case, by the second decade of the twentieth century, Indiana's prisons had developed into the large, organized, highly-regulated—yet very imperfect—system that it is today. This study focuses on the most intense period of organization and reform during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, each approaching Indiana's most important period of prison reform in a different way. The first chapter takes a traditional approach, covering Indiana's most essential reforms such as the decline of corporal punishment and the development of the Reformatory, indeterminate sentencing, parole, grading system, and educational programs. Most northern states adopted these reforms either before or around the same time as Indiana. In this sense, the Hoosier State is not unique. This chapter's aim is to fill a gap in historical literature by incorporating new and revealing sources, and also by providing much needed state-based coverage of a penal system that, despite its superficial lack of distinctiveness, had its own sense of development and reform.

The second chapter takes a more important and demanding approach specifically focusing on convict labor and exploring the meaning behind convict labor from a variety of perspectives: inmates, prison officials, manufacturers, and “free” laborers. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Hoosiers clearly adopted a new outlook on labor and its relationship to the prison system. While manufacturers and labor organizations intensified their fight to remove the competition of convict labor, the idea of convict labor itself transformed from a device of punishment and state revenue into a tool for constructive rehabilitation, moral development, and skill-building. Indiana serves as a suitable example to perform a more in-depth historical analysis of the meaning behind work in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century prison.

The least conventional of the three, the final chapter focuses less on Indiana’s prison system as a whole and more on one of the state’s most innovative penal institutions, the Indiana State Farm. Indiana built its penal farm to house misdemeanants in a central, state-controlled location rather than in the state’s notoriously atrocious local jails. Although other states utilized the penal farm, most notably those in the South, Indiana’s stands out as exceptional not only because of its largely rehabilitative purpose, but also because of the language surrounding its inception and development. The Indiana State Farm offers an opportunity for us to clearly see the Hoosier pioneer ideal manifested in a state institution. Furthermore, the farm also serves as a good case study for environmental historians to examine the relationship between inmates, the institution, and the surrounding environment and to actually place agency in the inmate, an overlooked and seemingly powerless historical being.

These chapters are not intended to provide a complete history of Indiana's late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century prison system. Other matters, such as those related to race and gender, have largely been left out. The Indiana Women's Prison, for example, was the first of its kind in the nation and certainly deserves investigation, but the issues surrounding its origins and development cannot be examined within the scope of this study. Despite their limitations, the aim of these chapters is to offer a new take on a Midwestern prison system in the midst of an exciting national, reform-minded, and "progressive" movement. Although national trends often sent states on similar paths, most significant prison-related activity occurred on the state level. With this in mind, historians must investigate the inner workings of individual state prison systems in order to have a true understanding for one of America's most important and—as present-day developments suggest—most controversial institutions. This history of Indiana's prison system is designed to add to the quest for a more complete history of the American prison.



## Chapter I

### **“She Owes Something”: The Rise of the Modern State Prison System in Indiana**

On the surface, Indiana’s modern “correctional facilities” appear to face many of the same dilemmas as their nineteenth-century ancestors. Much like prisons of the 1800s, today’s prisons are plagued with overcrowding, political scandal, inmate recidivism, the question of privatization versus state control, the issue of mental illness, and so on. However, the twenty-first-century prison has something that the nineteenth-century prison, for the most part, did not have—a genuine goal, successful or not, to rehabilitate inmates primarily through education, skill-building, and science-based treatment. This change in penal philosophy did not take place over the course of a year, or even a decade, but the voices of reform fell particularly heavily on the ears of Hoosiers as they entered the twentieth century. This study focuses on those voices and the critical process of ideas and words evolving into action. The actions of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hoosiers led to the modern prison system of hopeful goals and disappointing results that Indiana has today.

Previous scholarly work on prisons has proved invaluable in providing a background for this study. Two books in particular are vital in understanding prison reform in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. David Rothman’s *Conscience and Convenience* is particularly helpful with its discussion on the rise of individual inmate treatment. Rothman argues that reformers’ efforts to benevolently treat or cure the deviant through sophisticated testing and classification eventually were thwarted by the forces of “convenience,” which refers to the basic custodial care that characterizes our prisons today. One might say my own study appropriately supplements

Rothman's framework. Alexander Pisciotto's *Benevolent Repression* was also useful with its focus on the New York State Reformatory in Elmira, the United States' first men's reformatory. In many ways, Hoosiers modeled their reformatory on Zebulon Brockway's example at Elmira. This study takes a different approach than Pisciotto's in that it does not recognize social control as a primary function of the reformatory; Pisciotto argues that those running the Elmira reformatory aimed to discipline and repress the working classes. Although Indiana's reformers did not always have the most progressive or tolerant of ideas, their two chief concerns were to improve conditions for inmates and to better prepare inmates for their lives outside of prison.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980); Alexander W. Pisciotto, *Benevolent Repression: Social Control and the American Reformatory-Prison Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

Other scholarly works were also helpful to this study. For a good survey of developments in Indiana's prison system, see James L. Carey, "A History of the Indiana Penitentiary System, 1821-1933" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ball State University, 1966). Carey traces many of the penal reform movements in Indiana and provides a nice overview of some of the prison-related problems Hoosiers faced. My own study departs from Carey's in that it focuses much more attention on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Also, my study relies much less on legislative records.

For works on early America's penal system, see David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971, rev. ed.); Adam Jay Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and Mark E. Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). Rothman argues that the asylum was a product of Jacksonian America's fear of a disorderly social environment. Hirsch rejects the idea that the penitentiary was novel to nineteenth-century Americans, and he also disagrees with those who attribute the development of the early American prison to class interests. Michael Meranze applies Foucaultian concepts to the development of early American prisons. Mark E. Kann attempts to expose the hypocrisy of Americans by illustrating the patriarchal character of early American prisons.

For broad surveys of the American penal system, see Blake McKelvey, *American Prisons: A History of Good Intentions* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1977); Norval Morris and David Rothman, ed., *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Paul W. Keve, *Prisons and the American Conscience: A History of U.S. Federal Corrections* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991). McKelvey's book focuses largely on important figures in prison reform. His discussion on the rise of reformatory penology is useful, but because he covers such a large period, he devotes little space to the ins-and-outs of various programs, an analysis of their successes and failures, the experience of inmates, or the development of midwestern systems like that of Indiana. Edgardo Rotman's chapter in *The Oxford History of the Prison* does a nice job of synthesizing the work of previous histories concerning late nineteenth and early twentieth-century reform. Rotman describes the rise of the therapy-based prison and the complications caused by overcrowding. Paul Keve's book was of little use to this study, but he offers a good overview of federal corrections in the United States.

A few words about terminology and sources: The reader will find that I often refer to various “prison officials” as “reformers,” and also that a good portion of the cited material comes from prison officials’ reports. I believe that both these matters are justified because much of the push for reform came from those working within the system, and much of the major discussion about reform is included in their reports. Even many of the reform-related articles in Indiana’s newspapers rely on prison reports, Board of State Charities reports, or interviews with individual prison officials. Whether or not these sources provide a complete picture of the forces of reform, they do represent a significant one, and future scholarly work on prisons will benefit from studying Indiana’s most progressive prison officials. These reformers were on the front line in the battle against some of Indiana’s most egregious penal practices, and they sought to send Indiana’s prisons on a path away from torture and toward benevolent treatment and efficiency.

One of the first and most difficult challenges to prison reformers in Indiana was to redefine the purpose of the prison. Was the prison’s primary responsibility to punish the criminal in order to correct behavior and to serve as an example for others who took part in criminal behavior? Or was the prison supposed to truly reclaim the inmate as a

---

Some scholarly articles, with their emphasis on the state level, also proved helpful in writing this chapter: Vivien M. L. Miller, “Reinventing the Penitentiary: Punishment in Florida, 1868-1923,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 1, no. 1 (2000), 82-106; John Phillips Resch, “Ohio Adult Penal System, 1850-1900: A Study in the Failure of Institutional Reform,” *Ohio History* 81, no. 4 (1972), 236-62; Michael E. Telzrow, “Punishment and Reform: The Wisconsin State Reformatory,” *Voyageur: Northeast Wisconsin’s Historical Review* 18, no. 2 (2002), 24-33; Sterling Evans, “Entwined In Conflict: The South Dakota State Prison Twine Factory and the Controversy of 1919-1921,” *South Dakota History* 35, no. 2 (2005), 95-124.

Miller uses Florida’s transition from the penitentiary to convict leasing in the 1880s to show that Foucault’s “discipline and surveillance” were still present despite the departure from the Auburn or Pennsylvania models. Resch illustrates how partisan politics, overcrowding, and lack of funding contributed to the failure of late nineteenth-century penal reform in Ohio. Telzrow shows how the reformatory model with its educational and grading programs took form in Wisconsin. Evans describes the rise and fall of the twine factory in post-war South Dakota’s state prison, and the complex relationship between inmates, farmers, American trusts, and the Yucatan.

productive, valuable, and moral citizen?<sup>2</sup> Despite Indiana's constitutional vow not to treat criminals with vengeance, much of nineteenth-century Hoosier penology revolved around severe discipline and blatantly vengeful punishment. The lockstep formation, cat o' nine tails, unventilated cells, unwholesome food, dangerous working conditions, and striped uniforms were the products of this penology.<sup>3</sup>

In his book *State Prison Life* inmate Harry Youngman described some of the more brutal aspects of his experience in State Prison South in Jeffersonville, Indiana. The "luxuries" of his four feet by seven feet cell included a dirty straw mattress, an old army blanket, a wooden bucket for drinking water, and a night bucket. According to Youngman, guards would often whip the inmates for reasons unknown. Occasionally the warden—often inebriated—randomly handed out twenty-five strokes of the cat, which led to 225 marks on the unfortunate's back. Furthermore, prison officials were known to work and starve inmates to death, and as a form of entertainment, Youngman continued, guards would have target practice by shooting at an insane inmate named Pat.<sup>4</sup>

At a time when females were kept in the same facility, the warden and his men basically reduced the women to concubinage. "Nero would have blushed," Youngman

---

<sup>2</sup> Technically, rehabilitation of the prisoner has always been at least partially the goal of a prison, but here I use terms like "reclamation" and "rehabilitation" in reference to *positive* treatment such as skill-building or counseling as opposed to *negative* treatment like whipping or back-breaking labor. Adam Hirsch distinguishes between different types of rehabilitation with the terms "rehabitative," which refers to a more superficial correction of behavior, and "reclamation," which refers to a deeper type of reformation.

<sup>3</sup> The lockstep formation was a marching style in which an inmate would place his right hand on the right shoulder of the inmate in front of him. The line of inmates would step together with their right feet and then shuffle their left. The cat o' nine tails refers to a type of whip with nine separate thin "tails" or thongs attached to a handle.

<sup>4</sup> Harrie J. Banka, *State Prison Life: By One Who Has Been There* (Cincinnati: C.F. Vent, 1871), 110-90. The Indiana State Library's copy of *State Prison Life* shows Harrie J. Banka (in handwriting) as the author of this book. However, author and former prison chaplain Lucien Rule refers to "Banka's" account in his own book (Lucien Rule, *The City of Dead Souls*, [Louisville, KY: Kentucky Printshop, c1922]) and, after some research, points to a convict named Harry Youngman as the author. According to Rule, Youngman was a harness maker sentenced from Crawford County for grand larceny. He was an inmate at State Prison South from August 12, 1868 to May 20, 1871. This study will take Rule's findings to be correct and will hereby refer to the author of *State Prison Life* as Harry Youngman.

wrote. Youngman described a particular Christmas when the guards decided to choose women inmates as gifts to themselves, and then proceeded to have their way with them. Almost as disturbing, the guards were known to put on races in which the women were forced to run around unclothed. Seldom were any complaints about these practices taken seriously.<sup>5</sup>

Even if Youngman's account cannot be accepted as completely reliable, by the 1870s Hoosiers began to discover some serious problems in their prison system. The incarceration of women and the insane grew consistently as troublesome issues and the low rate of contracts along with inmate injuries pushed Indiana's prisons ever further into the red.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the conditions of the prisons, especially State Prison South, had fallen into a state of decay by 1872. The Board of Directors wrote to the governor, "The past year has been one of confusion, sickness and loss," and Warden L.S. Schuler pointed to the ventilation of the prison's cells, writing "I believe that if a man was closely confined in one of these he could not live over thirty days."<sup>7</sup>

Much of the disease that plagued the State Prison South originated in overcrowding and terrible drainage on the grounds, which eventually caused a "cesspool of filth" outside the cellhouses.<sup>8</sup> In 1874, Warden Schuler reported 1,200 cases of different diseases, which included 200 of dysentery and twelve fatalities.<sup>9</sup> Every year officials commented on the extraordinary number of consumption (tuberculosis) cases. Officials attributed this mostly to the small number of cells in comparison to the inmate

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 166-80.

<sup>6</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1870), 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1872), 1-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1875), 1-6.

<sup>9</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1874), 7.

population. Between 1874 and 1876, State Prison South's population rose from 388 to 531 when the prison only contained 315 cells.<sup>10</sup> It is not difficult to see why disease spread so rampantly in a small and unventilated waste pit.

As Indiana entered the 1880s, Hoosiers not only realized the gravity of their prison situation, but also began to take some real action. This early stage of change took a few different forms. First, the prisons corrected at least some of their environmental woes, most notably issues related to ventilation. For example, the State Prison South built a new cellhouse in 1880, which contained 400 more cells, electric lighting, a more substantial ventilation flue, and chambers for "night buckets" with separate flues to rid the cells of foul gases.<sup>11</sup> Second, Indiana's prisons began to phase out some of the more brutal and humiliating methods of punishment. Although the Indiana legislature abolished "the cat" in 1880, the whipping of uncooperative inmates continued at a lower rate and in a more calculated fashion.<sup>12</sup> The directors of State Prison North (in Michigan City, Indiana) explained their new whipping philosophy: "The human mind revolts at the idea of the use of the whip upon a fellow man, but the cat is still part of punishment in extreme cases of infractions.... When properly and carefully administered without excitement or passion [it] is the best means of restraining a passionate and depraved man."<sup>13</sup> Third, beyond the realm of corporal punishment, Indiana's prisons also took small steps to treat inmates with more dignity. Starting in 1874, the traditional striped uniform was gradually replaced with a less shameful wardrobe, usually a plain grey or

---

<sup>10</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1880), 1-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1880), 6-8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1881), 5.

black suit.<sup>14</sup> A more systematic uniform scheme would develop later as a result of inmate grading.

The voices of reform grew more earnest as Indiana approached the twentieth century. Often the loudest voices were those from the religious community. Reverend Mordecai W. Painter, the Moral Instructor at State Prison North, preached a kind of social gospel that tied prison reform to Christian morality and social progress. “With advance made in Christian civilization the idea of reformation in connection with the management of criminals and penal institutions has become a fixed fact,” Painter wrote, “and should be the great central thought in the management of such institutions.”<sup>15</sup> This new school of penology clearly shifted the focus away from punishment as one of the prison’s chief functions. Although practice would always lag behind theory, the mid-1880s served as a sort of turning point for Indiana’s prisons.

Advocates of change knew, of course, that the reformation of an inmate took more than just ideas. Moral Instructor J.J. Faude pointed out that away from the small library and occasional church sermon, the State Prison North had “no facilities for the work of elevating the habits, tastes and inclinations of the prisoners.” Faude recommended more lectures, night classes, and entertainment.<sup>16</sup> He was actually there when State Prison North initiated its first major educational venture in 1887, thanks to the support of the institution’s directors.<sup>17</sup> The directors reported, appropriately, that it took

---

<sup>14</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1874), 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1882), 15-17.

<sup>16</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1883), 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1887), 31.

more than a striped suit to “change the nature of a man.”<sup>18</sup> Education eventually became a cornerstone of Indiana’s new penology.

One of the major catalysts for reform was outrage over the inclusion of young boys in Indiana’s prisons.<sup>19</sup> It was not uncommon for a teenage boy to work and sleep near the most experienced and hardened of criminals. This obviously made no sense, especially to those who saw the prison’s main purpose as a center for reformation. In 1885, State Prison South’s Moral Instructor, Leander Cain, wrote disappointedly, “There are boys in this prison, serving twelve and twenty-four month sentences, for pilfering sums of less than two dollars in value, this often constituting the highest crime of which they were ever guilty.” Cain called for “milder punishment” and “more genuine reform.”<sup>20</sup> Views such as Cain’s eventually led not only to a more sophisticated probationary system to keep young offenders away from prison, but also a prison system based on the classification of inmates.

Arguably the single most significant motion by the Indiana General Assembly toward prison reform came in 1889 with the creation of the Board of State Charities (BSC). Before the BSC, Indiana’s various institutions, including prisons, had no central supervision. Positions at the prison, such as warden and board director, were subject to political patronage rather than merit, and corruption spread rampantly on a number of levels. Unfortunately for inmates, mismanagement often went unreported or unsettled since the prison administrators often had no one to answer to, and if an investigation was ordered by the governor it often had more to do with political differences between the

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 4-22.

<sup>19</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville, IN: Indiana State Prison South, 1888), 6-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville, IN: Indiana State Prison South, 1885), 12.



upper echelons of the Indiana government and the prison management than actual concern for inmates. The nonpartisan Board of State Charities supervised, investigated, and reported on Indiana's various institutions.

The BSC communicated with prison management, the governor, and the legislature, but more importantly, the BSC also listened to the voices of inmates. Some inmates made broad analytical statements about Indiana's prisons. For example, one inmate in 1894 attempted to convey the corrupting nature of the prison to the board: "No matter what good intentions or moral and religious training a man may have had before entering this prison, it will be obliterated by the present mode of treatment no matter what your crime may have been or how long you have to serve." According to him, if an inmate did not have any political ties, he was "sold," or contracted out, "like swine, or any other chattel."<sup>21</sup> Other complaints were more straightforward and urgent. In an 1899 letter about the State Prison North hospital, an inmate informed board secretary Amos Butler that there were "sick men laying there helpless on cots" and men that "cannot live but one or two days." "That doctor is something offle the way he treats the sick men here," he concluded.<sup>22</sup>

Although much hope existed for the Board of State Charities to improve conditions, at least some inmates saw the board's efforts as less than satisfactory. To this disgruntled group, the board appeared to have little substance and no real pull. This St. Patrick's Day song, written by a Hoosier inmate around 1901, conveyed his disappointment with the "fake" board:

---

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous Inmate to Board of State Charities, circa 1894, Indiana State Archives, Box GG #025078 "State Board of Charities, Thomas Murray Investigation, Prisoner's Letter." Folder: Investigation of Indiana State Prison South -- Cruelty Charge 1894.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous Inmate to Amos Butler, May 1, 1899, Indiana State Archives, Box GG #025078 "State Board of Charities, Thomas Murray Investigation, Prisoner's Letter." Folder: Indiana State Prison.

St. Patrick was a gentleman,  
His name we celebrate,  
For didn't we last Thursday eve  
To his great honor ate  
A great big square of circus bread,  
Washed down with cups of tay,  
And all because we had  
With us the Board of Charity

Chorus

Oh, didn't they smile, the quarter of  
a mile  
Of convicts that marched in  
And say the cake, the molasses  
cake,  
The cake that made us grin.  
St. Patrick's day has passed away,  
So has the Charity fake;  
'Twill be awhile before we smile  
On a royal feast of cake

The Charity Board, ho, ho! Ha,  
ha!  
Their deeds will shine on high.  
Won't they look great in a pair of  
wings  
In that mansion in the sky?  
But if the convicts had their say  
They'd be consigned below  
To his Satanic majesty,  
Where there is no ice or snow.

Chorus

The Warden collars onto one,  
The Doctor had the rest,  
And for the fine old lady,  
Why McClaughry done his best.  
They showed them this, told them  
that;  
Oh, it was a glorious fake,  
The Governor by this time knows  
We had molasses cake.

Chorus<sup>23</sup>

Prison officials also questioned the effectiveness of the board. Jason M. Keys, who worked alongside the chaplain at the Indiana State Prison (in Michigan City), described to his wife the brutality that still characterized his place of employment. "The discipline here is yet of the old Roman extraction," he wrote, "and has not kept pace with the parole law, which is the production of Christianity, while the other is concentrated extract of the eternal \_\_\_\_." The board was either weak or simply not doing its job. With a tone of hope, he said, "Some day some member of the board of charity will acquaint himself with the facts and turn upon such brutal, foolish tactics and he will at once make a record he may well be proud of."<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous Inmate, Indiana State Archives, Box GG, #025078, Folder: Letters of Prisoners, 1901.

<sup>24</sup> Jas. M. Keys to His Wife, Nov. 2, 1902. Indiana State Archives, Box GG #025078 "State Board of Charities, Thomas Murray Investigation, Prisoner's Letter." Folder: Indiana State Prison.

Despite its shortcomings, the supervision of Indiana's prisons vastly improved with the creation of the BSC. In 1903, Secretary Amos Butler reported to the other delegates of the National Conference of Charities and Correction on the success of the Indiana Board of State Charities. "Fourteen years ago," he said, "Indiana's state institutions were all under separate boards, unsupervised." The institutions were not only more efficient after the board's creation, but they were also placed upon a "higher plane" in dealing with inmates and other dependents. The board also helped in keeping the public informed about the work of the various institutions. The institutions were, after all, "of the people," and the criminals and dependents themselves were products of the various communities and their social conditions.<sup>25</sup>

A before-and-after look at the BSC is even better illustrated in a 1915 speech Butler gave to the American Prison Association. Before the board's creation, he said, there was political domination, frequent scandals, no regular supervision or inspection, only one biennial visit of the legislature, and no uniformity in methods. After the board's creation, he continued, emerged a uniform non-partisan administration; uniform records and methods of accounting; a merit system; frequent inspection and continuous supervision; improved business methods; higher standards in inmate care, parole, probation, and other general prison reforms. Furthermore, to the BSC's favor, it received support from all political tendencies—Republican, Democrat, and independent.<sup>26</sup> In addition to in-state support, Indiana's BSC also received the interest and praise of out-of-state officials. In 1907, Illinois sent an official to study Indiana's BSC. The *Indianapolis*

---

<sup>25</sup> Amos Butler, *The Experience in Indiana, Reprinted from the Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth National Conference of Charities and Correction, Detroit, May, 1903* (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis Co. Printers, 1903), 1-5.

<sup>26</sup> Amos Butler, *A State Board of Charities and Correction: Read at the Meeting of the American Prison Association in New Orleans, November 20, 1917* (1917), 1-6.

*Star* reported, “The Illinois Board of State Commissioners of Public Charities evidently believes that the ‘Indiana way’ of handling matters pertaining to charities is on a high plane of efficiency.” New Jersey also used Indiana as a model in developing its system of charity work.<sup>27</sup>

There is no doubt that the Board of State Charities aided in the transparency and regulation of Indiana’s prisons, but the day-to-day operation stayed in the hands of the prison management and the inmates themselves. Both state prisons, North and South, remained very brutal places for inmates despite the progress made throughout the 1880s. Facilities were often outdated and run-down, medical care was limited, corporal punishment was still used, overcrowding was never completely alleviated, factory conditions remained hazardous, and no real accommodations were made for “the insane.”

When Leon Hoffman, an inmate who later compiled a book of his own prison experiences, arrived at State Prison North in 1888, he faced many of the same conditions as inmates of generations past. Aside from the brutal working conditions (described in the next chapter), Hoffman was quickly introduced to the lockstep formation, primitive and disproportionate punishment methods, and of course, the infamous prison meal, the first of which consisted of “murphies” and “sowbelly” (potatoes with jackets and pickled pork, respectively) with “maggots for sauce” on the side and a low quality coffee he called “bootleg.” Hoffman and his fellow inmates were well aware of the political corruption that still played a significant role in Indiana’s prison system as well as the

---

<sup>27</sup> “Indiana Model for Illinois,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 4, 1907.

damaging nature of Indiana prison encounters. He left State Prison North openly jaded after his eleven-year stay, naming his book *A History of Blasted Hopes*.<sup>28</sup>

A major investigation in 1894 revealed a similar unsatisfactory situation at State Prison South. Like its northern counterpart, much of the criticism revolved around working conditions and the punishment handed out for failure to meet work requirements. Additionally, the Board of State Charities concluded that at least some “feeble minded or demented” inmates were treated with great cruelty. One such inmate named Cream was locked up for an entire day because he would not talk. Another mentally unstable inmate, Huston, refused to leave his cell, and when guards finally forced him out, Huston attempted to protect himself with a piece of wood only to receive a bullet in his arm. One of the biggest problems, the board found, was that inmates always had to go through the guards first in order to speak with the warden. Such a practice interfered with the reporting of abuses. According to the board, it certainly did not help that Warden Patten was consumed by the building of a new outer wall for the prison, a monstrosity that he designed himself.<sup>29</sup>

Such tales of abuse proved disheartening for the forces of reform, but Indiana would soon enter a period of great change and experimentation. Beginning in 1897 with the creation of the Indiana Reformatory along with the parole and indeterminate sentencing law, Indiana embarked upon a two-decade-long creative journey within its prison system. During a larger national period historians have since labeled the

---

<sup>28</sup> Leon Hoffman, *A History of Blasted Hopes, Or Eleven Years in an Indiana State Prison* (Self-Published, 1904), 55-60.

<sup>29</sup> Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions of the Board of State Charities, *Investigation of Mismanagement Charges, State Prison South*, (1894), Indiana State Archives, Box GG #025078 “State Board of Charities, Thomas Murray Investigation, Prisoner's Letter.” Folder: Investigation of Indiana State Prison South -- Cruelty Charge 1894, 1-4.

“Progressive Era,” Indiana participated fully and innovatively, especially in terms of penal reform. Of course, as with most reform efforts, Hoosiers often fell short of their goals, but their will to try for an ideal set Indiana on a path toward a more modern and humane treatment of criminals.

On April 12, 1897, Indiana State Prison South was converted into the new Reformatory. Initially, the only real change was the population itself, not the prison. The law creating the Reformatory sent all inmates over thirty years of age and those with life terms, to State Prison North in Michigan City (now simply called Indiana State Prison). Those inmates between sixteen and thirty would be sent to the new Reformatory. As the *Indianapolis Journal* explained, it was a sad day for the inmates at State Prison South who did not fall in the sixteen-to-thirty non-lifeterm category. Over 300 men who had become accustomed to their home were mass-transported by train to Michigan City.<sup>30</sup>

The Reformatory was thought to be a revolutionary step for Indiana’s prison system. The Reformatory, its Board of Managers wrote, “marked a new era in Indiana penal legislation.” To them, the Reformatory finally fulfilled the 1851 constitutional edict that “the penal code shall be founded on the principles of reformation, and not of vindictive justice.”<sup>31</sup> However, the Reformatory had a slow start considering the facilities and general organization of the institution were those of State Prison South. Thus, the Reformatory was criticized very early. In 1899, Charles Henderson, an Indiana-born sociologist from University of Chicago and president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, condemned the Reformatory for its slow progress. He saw no reason why Indiana’s Reformatory should lag behind America’s

---

<sup>30</sup> “Convicts Transferred from Jeffersonville,” *Indianapolis Journal*, April 12, 1897.

<sup>31</sup> *First Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1897-1898), 8-12.

first reformatory at Elmira, New York. He pointed to one of the cellhouses, which had been condemned since “Governor Baker’s time” (ca. 1869); it remained in use with its “miserable, narrow, low, unventilated, noisome cells.” Henderson considered the state a criminal in that it placed 400 men in 200 cells, having another 200 sleeping on cots in the corridors. Such a practice was unacceptable in a the “great rich, enlightened and humane state of Indiana.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite such criticism, a great deal of confidence surrounded the new institution’s creation. To many officials, the supposed soundness of theory along with the favorable results of other states’ reformatories made the Indiana Reformatory failsafe. “Success is assured,” Warden Alvin T. Hert told the Board of Managers after the Reformatory’s first year, “...it is an accomplished fact.”<sup>33</sup> In the next few years, all focus would lie on the Reformatory as it broke new ground with its grading system, trade schools, educational programs, and scientific treatment.

Apart from methods of punishment and the quality of facilities, one of the main criticisms of Indiana’s prison system since the 1880s had been the lack of proper classification of inmates. Reformers despised the indiscriminate mingling of various types of criminals within the prison’s walls. The theory was that younger and less hardened offenders could be negatively influenced by the presence of older and more dangerous criminals. On another level, a lack of classification meant less individualized treatment and insufficient recordkeeping. Reformers sought to combat this problem of classification on two fronts. First, the creation of the Reformatory served as the first line of defense in the separation of less experienced and veteran criminals. Second, both

---

<sup>32</sup> Charles Henderson, “Urgent Need of Reformatory,” *Indianapolis News*, Jan. 12, 1899, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *First Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory*, 18-21.

adult-male prison facilities, the Reformatory and the State Prison at Michigan City, initiated a grading system that sent inmates down a more individualized and less corruptive path toward reformation.

Before the creation of the Reformatory, the warden and directors of the State Prison South saw firsthand the supposed “corruption” of young inmates. In a commentary on his prison’s juvenile population, which included 154 boys under the age of twenty-one, Warden J.B. Patten wrote, “A few days ago I saw a boy eleven years of age a mere child with an innocent, baby face, in a State’s Prison, working in a gang of hardened negro criminals, clothed in degrading zebra stripes, with the humiliating brand of ‘State’s Prison’ burned into his character.”<sup>34</sup> Patten’s comments show not only a racial aspect to his penology, but also a general abhorrence toward the unorganized mingling of all types of criminals.

Unlike some reformers, however, Patten accepted the “congregate plan,” a plan that allowed inmates to work together and, therefore, rejected the complete isolation of all inmates. Patten wrote that the convicts “should be treated as members of a community and taught and held to a strict individual responsibility to duty as a member of that community.”<sup>35</sup> Prisons had to strike a careful balance that offered the benefits of social interaction while removing the excessive corruptive influences of that interaction. Because of views like Patten’s and the sheer impracticality of complete separation of inmates among the ever-growing prison population, the congregate plan became entrenched in the Indiana prison system.

---

<sup>34</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1890), 17-20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



Since installation of a better classification structure hinged on a more complete knowledge of individual inmates, Indiana's prisons had to improve their system of record keeping. A useful example of this expansion in documentation is Indiana's 1895 adoption of the Bertillon Method. In a time before fingerprinting, it was difficult to verify whether or not a criminal was who he claimed to be. Some would use fake names to avoid repeater criminal laws, and if an inmate escaped, prison officials could never be sure they recovered the correct man. In a time before fingerprinting, the Bertillon Method was the best tool for criminal identification. When the inmate came to the prison, officials took his photographs from various angles and performed a series of measurements, including the length and width of the head, left foot, outstretched arms, the trunk of the person seated, four fingers, the left arm, and ear.<sup>36</sup> Officials also took note of individual characteristics like distinguishing birthmarks and eye color. Such methods helped increase the accuracy of inmate histories.

The epitome of the classificatory scheme was the grading system put in place at both adult-male prisons. The grading system, established on October 31, 1897, served as a tool to categorize, punish, and reward inmates. In addition, it helped determine an inmate's readiness for release. Warden George A.H. Shideler explained the layout of the grading system as it took shape at the Reformatory. The system actually included two levels of grading. On the broadest level, inmates were placed in three different categories, or grades. Inmates in the first grade were the best behaved, and those in the third were the worst. With the first grade came all the best privileges: a gray uniform, a seat at the dining table, a larger variety of food, one letter every alternate Sunday, visits

---

<sup>36</sup> *Biannual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1895-1896), 12.

from friends once every two weeks, the freedom to chew or smoke in cells, and the privilege to wear a mustache. Second-grade inmates wore a checkered uniform and had access to most of the first-grade privileges, only in smaller doses or on a more limited basis. The third grade wore stripes and were deprived of all said privileges. For “general disorderly conduct,” such as “habitual laziness, untidiness, or negligence,” an inmate would lose a grade, unless the inmate was in direct violation of a prison rule in which case that inmate would also be placed in solitary confinement.<sup>37</sup>

Within this broad grading scheme, officials used another system that incorporated a more methodical and detailed scoring of each inmate. This system in practice, however, proved to be quite a challenge. Among the biggest problems with scoring the inmates was the issue of uniformity. For one thing, different officers had different standards. Another problem, according to assistant superintendent Leon Leaf, was the practice of judges sentencing older and more hardened criminals to the Reformatory. This not only increased the range of inmate types the officers had to deal with, but the officers also had the constant worry of the more hardened criminals influencing the Reformatory’s younger and less experienced inmates.

Leaf attempted to lay out some guidelines for scoring inmates in four categories: conduct, industry, progress, and skill. Scores were given weekly. If an inmate followed the rules, treated others with respect, and kept himself and his area clean, an officer should give him a 90 percent or above for conduct. The inmate would receive a 75 or lower for a minor offense and a 50 or lower for more severe offenses. For industry, the breakdown would look something like this: 90 or above if the inmate showed interest

---

<sup>37</sup> A.J. Warner and C.D. Reeder, *The Grading System, Two Views* (Jeffersonville, IN: Indiana Reformatory, 1900), 1-11.

and hard work, 75 to 50 if the inmate did not meet his quotas, and 50 or below for outright laziness or carelessness. For progress in work, an inmate received a 90 or above for consistent improvement, 75 to 50 for abnormally slow improvement, and 50 or below for no improvement. For skill, those assigned to a trade school who made steps closer to mastering the trade would receive a 75 or higher, and so on. For those assigned to common labor, satisfactory work would get an inmate 90 or more.<sup>38</sup> It is unclear how scores directly applied to the overarching three-grade system, but it can be assumed that consistent low scores (75 or below) or consistent high scores would lead to a change in grade.

The grading system served as a vehicle for a more extensive recordkeeping structure. In the past, records consisted of mostly infractions that the inmates might have committed during their stay. A modern grading system provided more complete and fluid records that illustrated “the general character and effort put forth by the inmate not alone to comply with the laid down rules of the institution, but also on his effort to fit himself for a good citizenship and future usefulness.” Like Leaf, Warner stressed the importance of uniformity in grading inmates. A good guide, he said, was to use a similar standard to that of the outside world. The inmate who followed the rules of the institution as closely as a free man followed the laws of society deserved a perfect score by Warner’s logic. If an inmate received below 75 percent for the month, any opportunity for parole was rescinded. Consequently, low scores required careful consideration, a meeting with the inmate to establish an understanding, and the approval of an assistant superintendent.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ideas on Reformation: Papers Prepared and Read by Officers and Instructors in the Indiana Reformatory at their Monthly Meetings* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory Printing Trade School, 1907), 17-20.

An officer in one of the Reformatory's shops, Charles Reeder, shed some light on the downsides of the grading system. According to Reeder, grading an inmate's industry was relatively easy, but for the categories of progress and skill, he found it very difficult to find an average among the inconsistencies in the inmates' work and behavior. Reeder also found difficulty in the lack of interest shown by the inmates toward the grading system. "The Grading system does not occupy an obtrusively prominent place in the mind of the average inmate," Reeder wrote, "and because it is so easily forgotten many men are careless." he concluded, "The grading system to date has had but little effect on my department."<sup>39</sup>

Effective or not, classification was key to Indiana's new penology. However, the ultimate goal was to treat the inmate as individually as possible. Although many inmates had a similar pattern of experiences that pushed them toward crime such as a less than satisfactory childhood, little education, alcohol problems, and so on, officials considered every inmate unique with a specific set of psychological traits. With intense testing and the placement in the correct job, cellhouse, and the prison's various extracurricular programs, the inmate could be put on the fast track to reformation.

Along with the classification system, Indiana attempted to integrate the latest scientific research to better evaluate and treat inmates. As David Rothman has shown, progressive prisons considered environmental, psychological, and biological elements of the inmate's character in order to treat each case as individually as possible.<sup>40</sup> Indiana's prisons support Rothman's assertion. Unfortunately, Indiana's use of science, especially

---

<sup>39</sup> Warner and Reeder, *The Grading System, Two Views*, 1-11.

<sup>40</sup> Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 50.

biology, could take an extreme and flawed form. One of the first instances of “science” entering the prison was inmate sterilization, a practice that was actually part of a larger eugenics movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As historian Alexandra Minna Stern has shown, Indiana’s relatively homogenous population and special brand of scientific racism produced a eugenics movement unmatched by any other state. In order to deal with its seemingly uncontrollable proliferation of criminals, the feeble-minded, insane, epileptic, and other “mental defectives,” Indiana passed the world’s first sterilization law in 1907. With the exception of a short stint in the 1920s, Indiana maintained a sterilization law until 1974. By the time Indiana repealed the law, over 2,000 Hoosiers had been sterilized.<sup>41</sup>

Inside the prison, simplistic analysis of the inmates and their family histories led to the belief that there was a criminal class of psychologically inferior parasites who inherited their condition from their parents. Two of the main figures in the quest to sterilize inmates were the Reformatory’s first doctor, Harry Sharp, and the secretary of the Board of State Charities, Amos Butler, who wrote extensively on mental defectiveness. In 1904, Dr. Sharp proudly reported that over the previous five years he had sterilized 176 inmates “for the relief of excessive masturbation and spermatorrhoea.” He continued, “I therefore suggest that you endeavor to secure such legislation as will make it mandatory that this operation be performed on all convicted degenerates. It renders them powerless to reproduce their kind, and it is an undoubted fact that the progeny of degenerates becomes a charge upon the state.”<sup>42</sup> Between 1899 and 1909,

---

<sup>41</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern, “‘We Cannot Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow’s Ear’: Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 103, no. 1 (2007): 7-10, 27.

<sup>42</sup> *Fourth Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1903-1904), 52.

Sharp's "Indiana Plan" led to the sterilization of 456 men.<sup>43</sup> Sharp was certainly not alone in his mission. Reformatory official G.E. Mowrer wrote, "In the case of abnormals, society has a good deal to ask of itself. We are coming to the right idea when we consider the idea of sterilization."<sup>44</sup>

Although the idea of sterilization was relatively popular in Indiana compared to other states, officials eventually realized the implications of such a practice. For example, Appellate Court Judge Frank Roby expressed his concern to the governor in 1909. Roby advised that Hoosiers should take steps to scale back the fairly common practice of sterilization to only extreme cases. To support his argument, he included the viewpoint of Indiana's prison reform poster boy Amos Butler. Butler, he said, "was greatly concerned when the act became operative over the probability of abuses or rather a too free use of it thereby creating a revulsion of sentiment." Roby recommended a "reverse movement" to keep the practice in check.<sup>45</sup> Roby was not alone. In 1909, Governor Thomas Marshall ordered a moratorium on sterilization, and Hoosiers became even more wary as legal officials across the country increasingly questioned the constitutionality of the various states' eugenics laws.

The fear of mental defectives, however, persisted well into the twentieth century. As late as 1923, Amos Butler preached the urgency with which "feeble-minded" individuals should be dealt. According to Butler, the family-history statistics from Indiana's various institutions showed that out of 803 families, more than half of the members were feeble-minded. According to a supposedly representative ten-county

---

<sup>43</sup> Stern, "We Cannot Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow's Ear": Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland," 11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ideas on Reformation: Papers Prepared and Read by Officers and Instructors in the Indiana Reformatory at their Monthly Meetings*, 89-100.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Roby to Governor Marshall, 1909. Indiana State Archives, Governors Papers (Marshall), Box 86, Folder 4.

survey in 1915, Indiana had approximately 56,718 mental defectives, of which only a very small percentage was in the proper institutions. The same study showed over half of the inmates in the Indiana State Prison as mentally defective. According to Butler, degenerate families produced generation after generation of criminals and poor relief dependents. Butler hinted at the possibility of a kind of apocalypse. “Everywhere our people have failed to realize what was happening,” he said, “and these weaker children of the land have grown incredibly strong in numbers and in power for evil.” With an extreme sense of urgency he wrote, “feeble-mindedness is one of the most potential destructive factors in our civilization.”<sup>46</sup>

Fortunately for inmates, the big push for sterilization fizzled and was replaced by a more sophisticated and nuanced approach to crime and the treatment of criminals. In the summer of 1912, prison officials and the scientific community collaborated to create a department of research at the Indiana Reformatory. The psychology laboratory paralleled the commencement of the research department, but other sub-departments soon followed including those dedicated to medical and sociological research. The research department took individual testing, classification, and treatment to a new level. Using relatively new techniques such as the Binet-Simon IQ test, researchers tested inmates for perception, association, memory, reason, orientation, fatigue, mental activity, motor control, moral appreciation, the ability to profit by experience, attention, the ability to carry on a conversation, and the ability to plan. Researchers further classified the inmates by the kinds of criminal activity in which they participated. These categories included habitual criminal, born criminal, criminal through passion, criminal by chance, accidental

---

<sup>46</sup> Amos Butler, “Some Families as Factors in Anti-Social Conditions,” *Economics, Genetics and the Family* I (1923): 387-90.

criminal, and criminal of positive psychosis. In addition to the inmates themselves, the researchers investigated the social condition of the inmates' parents, the criminal and medical history of their families, the religion and habits of their parents, their nativity, occupation, economic condition, and their general surroundings. Belief in the inheritance of criminality and mental defectiveness certainly did not die, but the research department made a greater and more scientific effort to attack crime on both the environmental and hereditary fronts.<sup>47</sup>

The new laboratory was endorsed by academics and reformers across the country including sociologist Hasting Hart of the Russell Sage Foundation, Charles Henderson from the University of Chicago, Zebulon Brockway, and Maude Ballington Booth. Warden Peyton explained how the lab would disseminate knowledge and significantly advance prison reform. He also emphasized that both heredity and environment played a role in crime. Interestingly, Governor Thomas Marshall rejected this view because he said it would be necessary to reject the religious doctrine of original sin.<sup>48</sup>

On the subject of mental defectives, the director of the department of research, Dr. Rufus Von KleinSmid, simply explained that more research needed to be performed on those individuals. Incarceration and the occasional sterilization was definitely not a complete solution. He agreed that mental defectives (the insane, alcoholics, epileptics, etc.) made up a large portion of the inmate population, but the mentally defective criminal had to be treated completely different from a mentally healthy one. These “subnormal” inmates either had to be placed into another specialized institution

---

<sup>47</sup> Rufus Von KleinSmid, *Preliminary Report of the Department of Research* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1914), 1-10.

<sup>48</sup> E.G. Davisson, “Professor R.B. von KleinSmid Head of New Laboratory at State Reformatory,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 13, 1912.



altogether, or separate wards had to be built alongside penal institutions to deal with these special cases. The Reformatory and other such institutions were designed for the normal inmate who made his way to prison as a result of his “lack of judgment” or “perversion of will.”

Essentially, officials like Von KleinSmid wanted to outsource the mentally defective to more appropriate hospital-type institutions so that focus could be placed on the reformation of men who could actually be reformed in the true penological sense of the word. This reformation would take place on an individual basis and, more specifically, through the “personal interview.” The personal interview was vital in establishing trust between officers and inmates, also opening the door to individual reformation. Von KleinSmid wrote, “Where purpose is wrong, it is the wrong purpose of the individual; where misunderstanding exists it is the misunderstanding of the individual first of all.” Von KleinSmid advocated a ground-up approach in treating a prison population. The reformation of one individual could affect all who came in contact with him. “That explanation which clears the atmosphere for the individual,” he wrote, “spreads its clarifying power over the mass.” The prison should treat its inmates “in the singular” just like a doctor or psychologist would treat patients. After a lifetime of criminal influences, only the “slow, patient, painstaking personal work of the teacher” could bring about a proper turnaround. Von KleinSmid concluded, “I should despair of moral reformation on any other grounds than the purely personal, and I know of no

method of procedure which would bring about the desired results as quickly and as certainly as those which are operative in the personal interview.”<sup>49</sup>

Whatever the proper reformation method, the research departments became a chief ingredient in the Reformatory machine by 1910, and outsiders took great interest in their findings. For one, the larger medical and surgical community showed interest because the research departments provided an extensive pool of data to tap for their own use.<sup>50</sup> And as with other prison reforms, the public showed interest in how the research departments helped the state. For example, in 1913, the *Indianapolis Star* sent a DePauw University psychology student, Allen Billingsly, to investigate the Reformatory’s new Department of Psychological Research. Among theories the department supposedly proved, it found that crime was not a disease but rather the product of a “defective or undeveloped brain,” and convicts should be considered “victims,” not “violators.” According to Billingsly, one of the Department’s first orders of business was to “better and improve the methods of treatment accorded the inmate of a penal institution.” For instance, a convict who had refused to work was identified as partially insane and saved from a normal prescription of time in the “hole,” a practice that might have led to complete and irreversible insanity. Through records that included hereditary histories, nervous conditions, test results of mental associations, and measurements of the brain and skull, the Reformatory psychologists found that most inmates came from unsatisfactory home lives. According to their statistics, only 6 out of 120 inmates had adult mental

---

<sup>49</sup> Rufus Von KleinSmid, *The Psychology of the Personal Interview: A Paper Read before the Decennial Convention of the Religious Education Association, Cleveland, Ohio* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, March, 1913), 1-11.

<sup>50</sup> “Medical Department at State Reformatory,” *Indianapolis News*, April 6, 1907.

capacities. Crime, they said, came from ignorance, irrationality, and strong passions. Because inmates were so emotionally “unbridled,” religious revivals were forbidden because they could be “brought easily to a state of frenzy.” Billingsly ended with some incredibly bold, but significant, statements. He wrote,

Indiana was the first state to declare that her purpose in dealing with criminals was not to wreak vengeance upon them [inmates] but to restore them to good citizenship. Now she is the first state to attempt through psychology to enter the skull of the convict and from the dark and hidden processes of his thought to learn his weaknesses and his frailties. Once ascertained the pitfalls to the weak can be removed and the criminal class in Indiana can thereby be reduced to a minimum.<sup>51</sup>

The research departments may have furthered the understanding of the criminal mind, but they did little practical work to ensure that inmates would not return to prison after being released. As inmate numbers continued to rise and cell space continued to shrink, prison officials began to implement more substantial educational programs to guarantee an inmate’s preparedness for the outside world. In 1899, the Reformatory’s education department reported that, on average, inmates had an education equivalent to little higher than third grade. Fifty percent of the inmates, the department continued, could not read or write at all.<sup>52</sup> Drastic action had to be taken.

In a 1907 report, School official George Asbury commented on the Reformatory’s school and its purpose. According to the 1897 law that created the Reformatory, each inmate was to be educated “in the common branches of an English education,” which basically referred to fundamental language and mathematical skills. If inmates mastered basic reading, writing, and spelling, they could move on to grammar, literature, history,

---

<sup>51</sup> Allen L. Billingsly, “Indiana Places Brain of Criminal Under Microscope,” *Indianapolis Star*, April 20, 1913, Mag. Sec., p.4.

<sup>52</sup> *Second Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1899-1900), 17-22.

government, geography, physiology, and hygiene. As for arithmetic, much of the coursework was based on practical knowledge the inmates could use in their trades. The teachers split the class time in half. The first half was devoted to group instruction, while the second half was left to the inmates for individual work and questions. In 1907 the average number of men enrolled in the Reformatory's regular classes was 300; this did not include the 150 to 250 that participated in correspondence courses. According to Asbury, in ten months' time the school could give an inmate a basic education that would normally take three years in a public school. One of Asbury's best insights can be found in his commentary on inmate reformation: "The problem of reformation is three-fold. "It must deal with the head, hand, and heart." The School of Letters, as his department was called, dealt with the "head" portion of reformative equation.<sup>53</sup>

In a statement made to various Indiana newspapers, Warden D.C. Peyton publicly explained his views on education and criminal reformation. He made it clear that inmate rehabilitation was not the only consideration for a prison. Economic efficiency and inmate self-sustenance certainly played a part, but, according to Peyton, the best economic investment for the state would be to place more resources into the education and training of the inmate, even if it meant losses in the short run. In the long run, he continued, "returns to the state would be vastly greater." Inmates would not only stay out of prison, but they would also actually contribute to society and the tax base as productive citizens. Peyton concluded with his own type of "head, hand, and heart" statement: "I would have you feel or know that I place our general, broad scheme of education first in importance of our work of reformation, and that I place labor second,

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ideas on Reformation: Papers Prepared and Read by Officers and Instructors in the Indiana Reformatory at their Monthly Meetings*, 21-27.

but that I do believe that a combination of the two does and will give the best results.”<sup>54</sup>

In fact, as the Reformatory developed, it appeared to be more and more like what Assistant Superintendent James Walker called “part workshop, part school, and part psychopathic hospital.”<sup>55</sup>

Similar to the Reformatory’s “school of letters,” a new trade school system provided an opportunity for inmates to learn a practical skill useful on the outside. These trade schools are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but one trade immediately worth mentioning is the printing trade and its byproduct—the inmate newspaper.

The *Reflector*, published by the inmates every Saturday was part of the new printing department. The weekly publication, usually eight to ten pages long, carried mostly stories from the outside, but prison-related opinion pieces from its exchanges would occasionally appear. For example, one piece in 1903 stressed the importance of separate cells in the Reformatory. Another expressed support for prison reform—more specifically parole and the treatment of crime as a disease. Numerous other articles dealt with the importance of education or hard work. “Work with a will,” one article said, “and you will soon have cause to believe that there is a bright side if you will only exert a little of your idle energy in getting the dust and dirt off.”<sup>56</sup>

The *Reflector* was criticized from outside sources, and presumably from inside sources as well, due to its one-sided nature. The *North Manchester Journal* claimed that

---

<sup>54</sup> D.C. Peyton. *A Talk by Dr. D.C. Peyton, Superintendent Indiana Reformatory, To Newspaper Men*, Mar. 1910 (1910), 1-4.

<sup>55</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1915), 7.

<sup>56</sup> *The Reflector*, reprinted from *Reformatory Outlook*, Nov. 28, 1903; “A Word for the Parole Law,” *The Reflector*, Dec. 5, 1903; “Seventh Year,” *The Reflector*, Dec. 26, 1903; Charles D. Reeder, “North Manchester Journal (Editorial),” *The Reflector*, Jan. 2, 1904; Q.E.D., *The Reflector*, March 4, 1904; *The Reflector*, Jan. 20, 1908.

the *Reflector* was “not a mirror true to life in the Reformatory.” The editor of the *Reflector*, Charles D. Reeder, took the criticism as a chance to reemphasize the paper’s mission. “Our aim is not to reflect our inside life,” Reeder wrote. “It is to reflect the best of the outside world.” Reeder felt that the inmates experienced enough of inside life to not need a recounting of it in paper form.

The paper also carried many pieces advising against alcohol and tobacco. After several accusations of overt self-righteousness, the *Reflector* published an editorial defending its stance. “We have been accused of presenting a dogmatical tirade in the place of convincing arguments in articles in these columns,” the author wrote. Sound Christianity served as his defense. After all, he continued, the immorality of tobacco and liquor was “a theoretical fact because divine law tells us that any thing which is harmful to the body is sinful.” Beginning in 1908, the *Reflector* went daily. According to the publishers, it was “the first attempt to publish a daily newspaper in an institution of this character.”

So many reforms in so little time prompted much excitement among Hoosiers, and progress seemed to be a given. In 1912, *Indianapolis Star* reporter Lee Robinson attempted to explain the supposed success of the Reformatory, or as he called it, the famous “Hoosier Plan.”<sup>57</sup> He claimed that it was the Hoosier Plan that brought a trainload of delegates from the International Prison Congress to Indiana to visit its institutions. Robinson’s description of the Hoosier Plan makes it seem fairly unoriginal, but one feature that seemed to pervade the supposedly unique system was a high level of

---

<sup>57</sup> It can be assumed that this “Hoosier Plan” is different than the eugenics-based one of Harry Sharp.

individual treatment. Officials tried to provide as much “personal contact” as possible with the newly arrived inmate. The inmate was made aware of the system of law at the Reformatory and his power to take his life into his own hands. If the inmate had a grievance, he was assured a hearing. This environment of fairness, wrote Robinson, destroyed much of the “hardness and bitterness in their hearts.” The soundness of the “Plan” was proven during a power outage when 1,200 inmates sat in the dark dining room with “not a sound, not a movement, not a word, an oath, a laugh, a cry of derision.”<sup>58</sup>

Expectedly, the Reformatory had its periodic setbacks with accusations of cruelty and overwork, but its impressive growth and development could not be ignored. Jeffersonville’s prison was no longer simply a sweatshop like the State Prison South of the past: It was a multi-cogged rehabilitation-based machine. Salvation Army leader and prison reformer Maude Ballington Booth visited the Reformatory in 1912 and informed the governor of the institution’s good work despite recent attacks. She wrote, “A very difficult problem is being faced in that institution in a very wise and kindly manner.”<sup>59</sup>

While the Reformatory trudged through its growing pains, the State Prison in Michigan City experienced its own rollercoaster ride. Although the purpose of the State Prison was more custodial than rehabilitative, many reforms such as indeterminate sentencing, parole, and a type of grading system were implemented. Unfortunately for the State Prison, however, reports of cruelty still surfaced. It is often unclear where truth ends and rumor begins, but it is certain that Indiana’s prisons had a reputation. In 1907, Brand Whitlock, the mayor of Toledo, Ohio, published a novel entitled *The Turn of the*

---

<sup>58</sup> Lee Lamar Robinson, “How the ‘Hoosier’ Plan of Handling Convicts Saved an Outbreak at the State Reformatory,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 17, 1912, Mag. Sec., p.1.

<sup>59</sup> “Maude Ballington Booth Sends Letter to Governor,” *Indianapolis News*, June 5, 1912.

*Balance* loosely based on the injustices and corruption of city life. In one portion of the book, supposedly based on the State Prison at Michigan City, he made critical remarks regarding prison conditions and management. In an effort to preserve any remaining integrity of Indiana's prison system, Warden Reid denied the accusations, calling the novel "anarchistic." He told the *Indianapolis Star* that "the author either has a profound disregard for facts and truthfulness, or is grossly ignorant of modern methods of dealing with the criminal."<sup>60</sup>

The State Prison officials did what they could to keep publicity positive. In 1913, Warden Fogarty announced to the *Indianapolis News* that the notorious place of solitary confinement known as the "hole" was abolished. Other parallel reforms included the abandonment of striped uniforms, the elimination of the third grade, and the introduction of a "credit system." The credit system worked as follows: If an inmate properly conducted himself for a month, he would receive one credit. After twelve credits, the inmate earned a merit braid, which he then wore on his sleeve. An inmate was required to have at least one merit braid to be considered for parole.<sup>61</sup>

By 1918, Fogarty reported more improvements—this time to the *Indianapolis Star*. The prison, he said, was "a filtration plant through which a murky and corrupt stream of humanity passes and comes out purged and ready to serve civilization." He explained that the primitive methods such as striped uniforms, shaved heads, and the lockstep were things of the past. Moreover, the State Prison had ridded itself of the old gallows; interestingly, it was torn down in 1915 and converted into the warden's office

---

<sup>60</sup> "Novel Said to be Aimed Against Brutality in Indiana Penitentiary," *Indianapolis Star*, April 7, 1907.

<sup>61</sup> "Dread 'Hole' at Prison Abolished," *Indianapolis News*, April 10, 1913. A merit braid arrangement was actually first introduced in 1903. *Biannual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1902-1904), 6-10.



furniture. Indiana passed a law in 1913 making electrocution the preferred method of capital punishment.<sup>62</sup>

Fogarty mentioned two more developments in the 1918 report which are worth discussing at greater length. First, the State Prison had instituted a fairly extensive military drill program. Military drill was by no means new, and it was not limited to the State Prison. It is unclear when and where Indiana's first prison military drill program was organized, but by 1907 officials at the Indiana Reformatory were commenting on its usefulness as a means to instill physical fitness, discipline, obedience, and manliness in the inmate. Led by an officer who had some type of military training, the inmates participated in at least two hours of calisthenics and marching.<sup>63</sup> Inmates not only participated in drill, but were organized according to an army-based hierarchy, in which some inmates held higher ranks than others. The number of chevrons on an inmate's sleeve indicated if he was a sergeant or corporal. Ideally, better order could be maintained with inmates regulating themselves.<sup>64</sup> According to Reformatory officials, military drill also aided the officers in their quests to become better "commanders." Officers could reach a certain uniformity in their commands over the inmates, and drilling the inmates also taught the officers "cool headedness, good judgment, promptness in duty, neatness of person, pride in work, military etiquette, and a thorough study of human nature."<sup>65</sup> One official noted that numerous colleges and high schools

---

<sup>62</sup> "Indiana Prison Filters Morals," *Indianapolis Star*, August 11, 1918.

<sup>63</sup> *Ideas on Reformation: Papers Prepared and Read by Officers and Instructors in the Indiana Reformatory at their Monthly Meetings*, 35-38. Later, inmates would use wooden "guns" in their drill.

<sup>64</sup> "Regiment Formed at Indiana Reformatory," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 2, 1912.

<sup>65</sup> *Ideas on Reformation: Papers Prepared and Read by Officers and Instructors in the Indiana Reformatory at their Monthly Meetings*, 28-33.

had instituted military drill as a part of their curricula, and it had “proved a wonderful success wherever it has been tried.”<sup>66</sup>

The second significant development Fogarty mentioned in his report to the *Star* was the introduction of the inmate dormitory. A 1915 State Prison report first references an Indiana dormitory plan, but 1916 marks the point at which any real philosophy behind the dormitory is expressed. Superintendent D.C. Peyton of the Reformatory commented briefly on a new two-floor “modern dormitory.” Peyton praised the new “dormitory method,” which allowed the inmates to socialize freely in a healthy environment similar to the outside world.<sup>67</sup> The rise and acceptance of the inmate dormitory is quite significant for two reasons. First, the dormitory marks a clear break from a penology based at least partly on inmate separation. Inmate congregation and community building was now considered advantageous. Second, the dormitory would become a cornerstone of the overcrowded Indiana prison system and a major component of modern inmate life over the course of the twentieth century.

Certainly all of these developments illustrate Indiana’s growing concern with prison reform, but arguably the most groundbreaking and contentious between 1880 and 1920 was the introduction of the indeterminate sentence and its companion, parole. Before 1897, Hoosier inmates were sentenced much like they are today, that is, they received a fixed and predestined sentence based on the type of crime committed. Due to various “good time” laws, an inmate could technically be released sooner, but the inmate generally knew when he would be released. After the passing of the indeterminate sentence law, a criminal would receive a range of years as his sentence. For example, a

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1916), 6-10.

man would receive two to twenty-one years for manslaughter. A parole board would periodically check in with the inmate to gauge his readiness. If an inmate was released before his maximum sentence, he would be placed on parole, which meant he could work on the outside under the supervision of a parole “agent.”

As with the Reformatory, Indiana arrived relatively late in the game when it finally adopted the indeterminate sentence and parole. Warden Charley Harley of State Prison North visited the prisons of other states in the early 1890s and reported that Indiana was “far behind,” especially in terms of grading and parole.<sup>68</sup> But 1897 was a very big year for Indiana, and as far as most officials were concerned, it was on the fast track to the penological vanguard. The first few years, of course, were vital ones for the new system.

After the first year, both the Reformatory and State Prison maintained high hopes for indeterminate sentencing and parole. According to Reformatory statistics, only 17 out of 162 men released in the first year violated parole.<sup>69</sup> In the future, this type of statistic was the predominant way to measure success. Four years later, the Reformatory did not fare so well with 25.5 percent of parolees classified as “unsatisfactory cases.” State Agent James Comfort explained, however, had nothing to do with a lack of discretion by the parole board or with shortcomings in parolee supervision.<sup>70</sup>

The practice of defending indeterminate sentence and parole and attributing failure to minor administrative flaws quickly became commonplace among prison officials and would continue well into the future. James Comfort blamed some failures

---

<sup>68</sup> *Biannual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1898-1900), 65.

<sup>69</sup> *First Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory*, 8-12.

<sup>70</sup> *Third Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1901-1902), 35.

on the placement of paroled inmates in urban areas. Comfort wrote, “The temptations of the towns have proved too much for that number of paroled men.” According to his statistics, 77 percent of delinquent parolees were sent to town. “It is therefore advisable,” he recommended, “...to locate men in country places rather than in towns; and experience has shown that paroled men are more likely to do well when sent to their families....”<sup>71</sup> Comfort, along with many of his contemporaries, saw much more reformatory potential in rural life.

By 1903, officials were able to comment at greater length on the new system. Warden Reid of the Indiana State Prison explained to Governor Durbin the advantages of the five-year-old indeterminate sentence and parole law, a law that—in his eyes—was still in an “experimental stage.” First, Reid told the governor, the law was important because it provided post-release supervision for inmates in order to ease the transition into outside life. Second, in an age when classification and individual treatment reached the height of their popularity, the indeterminate sentence allowed officials to release less hardened criminals after a very minimal term in prison or keep a “real” criminal for a longer term.<sup>72</sup> The indeterminate sentence relied partly on the grading system described earlier. In order to gain parole, an inmate had to maintain a perfect record in the first grade for the six months preceding his parole meeting. From there, the parole board took into account two more conditions. First, the inmate was judged on the adequacy of his

---

<sup>71</sup> *Second Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory*, 20-24.

<sup>72</sup> Warden Reid to Governor Durbin, 1903, Indiana State Archives - Governors Papers (Durbin), Box 62, State Prison Folder.

character, tendencies, habits, and ideas. And second, the parole board reviewed the nature and circumstances of the inmate's crime.<sup>73</sup>

The last advantage Reid mentioned to the governor was the indeterminate sentence's utility as a "strong deterrent force." Reid's fellow officers had told him that they noticed fewer returning offenders. "It seems to me," he wrote, "that the correct theory is that they are leaving the state because of their fear of the indeterminate sentence."<sup>74</sup> It is not clear whether or not the indeterminate sentence actually deterred crime, but one can see why officials would think so. A survey in 1904 indicated that indeterminate sentencing kept inmates in prison longer than determinate sentencing. When Indiana still used determinate sentences, the average time served was one year, eight months, and twenty-two days. Under the indeterminate sentence, the average time served was two years, four months, and six days. The only inmates who served less time than they would have under determinate sentencing were those convicted of rape and manslaughter.<sup>75</sup> By 1915 the average time served was up to three years and twenty-one days.<sup>76</sup>

Parole quickly became a divisive subject, but the division was not based so much on the idea of parole itself. Rather, parole's administration was the major point of contention. Although politics certainly played a role in their falling out, the differences between Warden Whittaker of the Reformatory and Indiana's governor concerning parole proved disastrous for the former. Governor Marshall claimed he had been receiving

---

<sup>73</sup> Warner and Reeder, *The Grading System, Two Views*, 1-11.

<sup>74</sup> Warden Reid to Governor Durbin, 1903, Indiana State Archives - Governors Papers (Durbin), Box 62, State Prison Folder.

<sup>75</sup> *Monthly Report* (1904), Indiana State Archives, Box unnumbered (Board of State Charities, Prison Reform, Parole Laws), Folder: Comparative Statistics on Time Served, Indiana Reformatory.

<sup>76</sup> F.C. Paschal to D.C. Peyton, Aug. 15, 1915, Indiana State Archives, Box unnumbered (Board of State Charities, Prison Reform, Parole Laws), Folder: Comparative Statistics on Time Served.

letters informing him that discriminatory methods were being used in paroling inmates. According to these letters, it was nearly impossible to be released on parole at the end of a minimum sentence. Warden Whittaker and the Reformatory's Board of Trustees, on the other hand, saw a longer period in the Reformatory as a chance to learn a trade and better prepare an inmate for life on the outside. Essentially, the two administrations argued over who would have control of parole's implementation. For the time being, this power remained in the hands of the Board of Managers, also known as the Parole Board.<sup>77</sup>

For the most part, however, parole remained quite popular among Hoosiers. The *Indianapolis News* reinforced this popularity in a 1914 article on Indiana's "great prison work." Seventeen years had passed since the inauguration of the indeterminate sentence and parole law, the author wrote, and the results were "remarkable." They were so remarkable, in fact, that a representative of Indiana's Board of State Charities was requested by the International Prison Congress to speak at its 1910 conference in Washington, D.C. on the subject of Indiana's prison system. The author's commentary was supplemented by statistics: Between the State Prison, the Reformatory, and the Women's Prison, a total of 8,221 inmates had been paroled from 1898 to 1914, and for each institution, about 26 percent of its parolees violated their parole. From here, the author's statistics are confusing in that they do not really coincide with the 26 percent claim. The author reported that, out of all the violators—3,145 total (38 percent, not 26)—one out of every 250 were caught. (Supposedly 895 were still at large in 1914.)<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> "Not Satisfied with the Parole Policy," *Indianapolis News*, July 1, 1909.

<sup>78</sup> "The State's Great Prison Work," *Indianapolis News*, May 8, 1914.

This article's complimentary description of the parole system brings up a curious point. The success of parole seems to have been taken for granted among contemporaries. The twenty-first century reader must ask on what standard these laudatory remarks were based. For one, the 1914 violation rate did not show any remarkable decrease from previous years. When compared to the violation rate of the Reformatory's first year (around 10 percent), the rate actually increased. Furthermore, one cannot help but question the success of a system in which one out of every 250 violators is caught. This not only shows why inmates may have had a lack of respect for parole, but it also shows the inability to enforce parole rules. Lastly, considering the substantial theoretical base, the large number of rehabilitative programs, and the less dangerous or hardened population that characterized the Reformatory, one would expect that the institution would have a lower parole violation rate than, say, the State Prison; this was not the case. The relatively equal rates among Indiana's institutions bring into question the effectiveness of both the Reformatory and parole.

The popularity that indeterminate sentencing and parole maintained during the second decade of the twentieth century waned as Indiana entered the 1920s. The system itself had not become any less successful, but criticism certainly increased. Criticism usually came in two forms. First, many Hoosiers were troubled by the fact that so much power lay in the hands of the parole boards. Instead of an inmate receiving a standard sentence for a particular crime, his life was in the hands of a possibly discriminatory parole board that could extend a sentence well beyond that of a fellow inmate who committed the same crime. Second, at least some Hoosiers saw problems in how juries and judges accommodated for the indeterminate sentence. For example, juries would

sometimes resort to a verdict of second-degree murder with a life sentence, rather than a manslaughter verdict under which the convict might only serve an unacceptably short two years.<sup>79</sup> The difference between a two-year sentence and a life sentence is obviously huge. Governor Ralston favored a law that would fix an exact sentence for manslaughter, somewhere between the existing penalty of two to twenty-one years.

By the late 1920s, Indiana's prison officials expressed great worry over their indeterminate and parole system. The Board of State Charities actively sought advice from the American Prison Association (APA) and officials from other states including New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut, but the APA could not offer much help. The general secretary, E.R. Cass, replied that attacks on the indeterminate sentence and parole law seemed to be the "fashion of the day," so he was "not surprised" that Indiana was receiving the same criticism. He claimed, however, that parole itself was not at fault: "We have insisted that the theory and principles underlying the indeterminate sentence are sound," he wrote, "and that we have been suffering from poor administration." In sum, the idea was sound, but its application was flawed.<sup>80</sup> Indiana officials had already held a similar view. BSC official A.F. Miles explained in 1927 that the 1897 law had "vindicated itself and was a thorough success" until a rise in crime and public dissatisfaction shook the faith in every facet of Indiana's criminal code. Like Cass, Miles found no fault with the law, but rather attributed failure "to the general unusual conditions prevailing in the country at this time."<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> "Longer Sentence for Manslaughter," *Indianapolis Star*, April 8, 1914.

<sup>80</sup> E.R. Cass to J.A. Brown, Jan. 4, 1927, Indiana State Archives, Box unnumbered (Board of State Charities, Prison Reform, Parole Laws), Folder: BSC--Prison Reform (Ind. Sent and Parole) 1927.

<sup>81</sup> A.F. Miles to Unknown, 1927, Indiana State Archives, Box unnumbered (Board of State Charities, Prison Reform, Parole Laws), Folder: BSC--Prison Reform (Ind. Sent and Parole) 1927.



To an extent, the administration of the parole system was a valid concern for Indiana's prison officials, particularly in the area of parolee supervision. As late as 1937, Indiana had fewer than eight agents supervising all of the state's nearly 1,800 parolees.<sup>82</sup> The agents could not possibly have kept proper watch over their assigned inmates. Even if a low number of agents was not necessarily the cause of parole failure, it certainly did not help.

The attacks on the indeterminate sentence and parole continued. By 1938, parole became so unpopular that John H. Klinger, director of the Division of Corrections of the State Department of Public Welfare, contributed a series of informative pieces on prison and parole to the *Indianapolis Star*. Klinger attributed much of the criticism to misinformation and a large amount of negative publicity surrounding the crimes of parolees. He assured his readers that new methods in psychological and psychiatric examination and case histories would improve the parole process considerably.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the indeterminate sentence's decline in popularity from its early years, it had become firmly entrenched in Indiana's prison system. Hoosiers continued to modify indeterminate sentencing and parole in the hopes that positive results would mute the criticism. Considering that the basic framework stayed in place for eighty years, they were fairly successful. In 1977 a loose coalition including inmates, conservatives, and liberals finally rallied enough support to abolish indeterminate sentencing and reinstate a system based on fixed sentences.<sup>84</sup> This is the system we use today.

---

<sup>82</sup> "Progress Since Reorganization of Parole Supervision System," *Indianapolis Star*, March 10, 1937.

<sup>83</sup> John H. Klinger, "Prison and Parolees," *Indianapolis Star*, Jan. 2, 1938.

<sup>84</sup> "Fixed Sentences Gain Favor," *Time*, Dec. 12 1977, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915844-1,00.html>

In the end, the vast array of reforms put into place in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indiana had a marginal effect on the reformatory power of the prison. In terms of parole, the violation rate between 1900 and 1930 consistently hovered around the 25 percent mark. In terms of inmate population, numbers continued to grow beyond the capacities of the Reformatory and the State Prison. Between 1900 and 1930, the average population of the Reformatory increased from 940 to 1,790. The average population of the State Prison increased from 785 in 1900 to 2,290 in 1930. Rates of recidivism would be helpful in assessing success and failure, but the data for this are often unreliable and scattered. Prison officials did not always report a complete set of statistics every year, and even if they did, in the early years it could not always be proven whether or not an inmate had been convicted of a crime before. This makes a before-and-after comparison very difficult. A 1920 set of statistics from the State Prison medical department, however, gives us some idea that the situation was definitely not the most favorable, even after the barrage of reforms. The department reported that out of 217 inmates examined that year, 160 admitted to a previous arrest or conviction.<sup>85</sup> Even if this group of inmates was not entirely representative, the fact that 73 percent of these sick inmates were repeaters is enough to make anyone skeptical of reform.

Whether or not Indiana's reforms had any significant effect on crime, they were certainly groundbreaking in that they separated Indiana's prison system from some of the worst crimes against humanity that the state had ever committed. The reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are representative of a new responsibility in the state's treatment of its citizens. In his commentary on the indeterminate and parole law,

---

<sup>85</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison, 1920), 55.

Reformatory officer J.S. Potter rejoiced that Hoosiers were finally looking after their most unfortunate. He wrote, “By this act, society admits that *she owes something*—that she has been neglectful in a large degree toward a delinquent class of her number.”<sup>86</sup>

Hoosiers were aware that perfection was unattainable, but they took an extraordinary leap in placing at least part of the blame for the crime problem on themselves.

---

<sup>86</sup> *Ideas on Reformation: Papers Prepared and Read by Officers and Instructors in the Indiana Reformatory at their Monthly Meetings*, 89-100. Italics added.

## Chapter II

### Skill and Morality in the Progressive Prison

Throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, labor stood as the cornerstone of the American prison system. Convict labor financed the prison, but at the same time, served as a means for both punishment and rehabilitation. Whether historians focus on basic prison management or advancements in penology, it is impossible to study the American prison without in some way dealing with convict labor. However, even the most labor-oriented historical scholarship on prisons fails to fully engage the meaning behind work in American penology. Glen Gildemeister's *Prison Labor and Convict Competition with Free Workers in Industrializing America*, for example, does a nice job in placing prison labor in a context of industrialization and mass production, but Gildemeister devotes little time to reformers' effort to provide inmates with skills.<sup>87</sup> In most cases, the discussion on labor, especially in regard to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century penal reform, is limited to a superficial debate about convict labor's competition with free labor and the eventual abolition of contract labor. Coverage of this debate is certainly not a bad thing considering it provides a launch pad for future work, but closer analysis may reveal some important facets of convict labor that could improve our understanding of the inmate's experience as a worker, the role of work in prison reformers' ideologies, and the meaning of convict labor to free laborers.

Indiana serves as a suitable case study in which to conduct this closer investigation for a variety of reasons. First, the vast majority of the United States'

---

<sup>87</sup> Glen A. Gildemeister, *Prison Labor and Convict Competition with Free Workers in Industrializing America, 1840-1890* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987). Other works consulted for this study can be found in footnote one of chapter I.

correctional activity is done on the state level, so it makes sense to choose a state, such as Indiana, on which to focus. Second, Indiana could be considered a northern state with a northern-style penal system, which is helpful since this type of system is most popular among historians of prisons and includes such significant late nineteenth-century reforms as parole, indeterminate sentencing, the reformatory, and the abolition of corporal punishment. Third, as a member of this northern group of states, Indiana also partook in the late nineteenth-century industrial transformation that not only changed the economic and social character of the state's citizens and their businesses, but also their institutions, like prisons. For a historian who wishes to study labor and the ideas surrounding labor, this period of transformation is particularly interesting.

As stated, this study focuses on the last portion of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth. On the subject of convict labor, this focus allows us to see the remnants of corrupt contract-labor regimes, the push for reform and new systems of labor, and the application of those reforms, successful or not. In each phase in this transition, it is possible to identify the views of inmates, administrators, reformers, and the public on labor and concepts related to labor, such as skill and morality.

Interestingly, and maybe unfortunately, the best look into inmates' attitudes toward labor comes in the first phase when they were subject to backbreaking manufacturing work with little or no regulation. It is difficult to gather a large number of inmate accounts from the nineteenth century when many inmates were illiterate, and even if they could write, any journal or writing of substance could have been easily confiscated by the prison's strict regime. In Indiana, however, an inmate named Harry Youngman

was able to document his five-year stay at the Indiana State Prison, from entrance to release.

Youngman's book, published in 1871, provides a helpful glimpse into Hoosier inmate life in the late nineteenth century. Among the wide variety of topics Youngman covers, he describes the brutality used against him and his fellow inmates, the corruption of prison officials, the experiences of women inmates (who still resided at the State Prison), the food and clothing provided at the prison, the kind of work to which inmates were subjected, and a number of reforms later officials implemented. Possibly Youngman's most interesting words, though, come in his commentary on work. According to Youngman, with the exception of the three less-than-satisfactory meals throughout the day, inmates did "nothing but work." Lucien Rule, a historian and former chaplain of the State Prison South in Indiana, wrote that the old prison regimes of the nineteenth century treated the incoming inmate as a "new machine," a "beast of burden," and "just a number."<sup>88</sup> Inmates were assigned to menial jobs in one of the prison's array of factories and shops. These shops were controlled by three contractors who dealt in products ranging from harnesses and collars to wagon carriages and agricultural implements. Because much of an inmate's life was spent in these factories and shops, contractors played a large role in the prison's operation.

Youngman was clearly discontent with the brutal conditions, but more importantly with the nature of work in the prison's factories, or as he calls them, "human mills." Among all the production at the state prison, Youngman writes, there was "not one trade a man can learn." For example, Youngman explains disgustedly that in the

---

<sup>88</sup> Lucien Rule, *The City of Dead Souls* (Louisville, KY: Kentucky Printshop, c1922), 50.

harness factory, “no man makes a harness complete.”<sup>89</sup> The importance of a trade stands at the heart of Youngman’s commentary. Without a trade, a man left prison “no wiser” and would turn to the same sort of activities that led him to prison in the first place. “The system is money to them,” Youngman writes. The plight of the prisoner and his or her education were of no concern to the prison administration, much less the prison contractors. Youngman pleads to his readers to use their votes to correct such injustices, and he explains desperately that the prison must incorporate a school and a trade education program if rehabilitation is to have any part in Indiana’s penology.<sup>90</sup>

It would be foolish to treat Youngman’s book as representative of all inmates’ thoughts and feelings, but it is safe to assume that most inmates did not see their prison experience as one in which they became a better-prepared and more skilled worker. To inmates like Youngman, it was clear that they were not working for themselves. As far as they were concerned, they were simply cheap labor for a corrupt contractor. Very few inmates thought they were better off inside the prison’s walls than outside, but certainly no inmate saw benefit in working tedious jobs under brutal conditions for over ten hours per day at little or no pay.

Youngman’s commentary on the prison hospital further illustrates the experience of workers at the Indiana State Prison. Sick inmates were often accused of trying to avoid work and sent right back to the shop. Youngman sums up the experience of most inmates with the prison physician’s abnormally quick evaluation:

“Let’s see your tongue...how’s your bowels? Go to your shop! Next!”

---

<sup>89</sup> Harrie Banka, *State Prison Life: By One Who Has Been There* (Cincinnati: C.F. Vent, 1871), 68-72.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-75.

Youngman describes the experience of an inmate with heart disease who was told to gargle a certain “cocktail” that simply made him vomit. A large percentage of inmates were treated likewise with a dose of ipecac that made the inmate sicker than he was originally. Apparently, the idea was to teach the inmate a lesson to prevent future laziness, but such practices led to premature inmate deaths, such as that of George W. Kelso, who was reported for “playing off.”<sup>91</sup> Youngman again attributes such cruelty to the power of the contractors and their quest for “slave” labor.

Although Youngman dedicates much of the last portion of his book to the reforms instituted during the final years of his stay, he recognizes that there were still abuses and corruption. Again, the subject of labor concerns him. “Why prison labor is rated so low,” Youngman points out, “is a question we have never heard.” According to him, the inmates under contract were paid forty-four cents per day, while the average free man was paid two dollars per day.<sup>92</sup>

Youngman’s question about the value of convict labor is an interesting one and deserves consideration even in the twenty-first century. Although there were surely differences in their facilities and management, the inmates did essentially the same work as normal workers. If anything, Youngman explains, prison labor was worth more than free labor. Strikes were never an issue with prison workers, and the products were often of better quality. Prison-made products were often displayed at county and state fairs as premium goods. Contractors capitalized on the superior work of inmates, and they even postponed the release of a certain German inmate due to his unmatched skill. Prisons were not self-sustaining, Youngman explains, because prison-labor was “let too low.”

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 127-36.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 410-15.



The state prison administrators, to a degree, would have agreed with Youngman on this point. They were troubled by the fact that they often had to settle for less favorable contracts than expected.<sup>93</sup>

Convict labor was “rated so low” for a variety of reasons, some more obvious than others. First, work in the prison was being performed by those on the lowest rung in society, a rung that included those who in some way rejected social values and norms and that were usually in some way connected to productivity. Most non-inmates thought of convict labor as inferior and would in no way place the products of inmates and free laborers in the same category. Furthermore, contractors were most likely hesitant to accept such a social class to make their product out of concerns linked to product quality and inmate behavior.

The low rate of convict labor can also be ascribed to the relationship between prisons and contractors and the manner in which prison officials sought contracts. If a contract expired, or in the case of 1876 the contractor went bankrupt, the prison placed an advertisement in the newspaper in an effort to contract a now-idle lot of inmates.<sup>94</sup> In the free labor world, an individual worker contracted his or her labor directly with the employer. In the world of convict labor, a third party contracted an entire faceless pool of labor to an employer who may not have even been seeking labor, much less a group of hundreds. Furthermore, while a free worker signed up for an indefinite period and could move on when he or she felt, convict labor was locked into a contract for a predestined number of years. Such differences between free and convict labor may seem obvious, but

---

<sup>93</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1870), 3-4. The board commented in their 1870 report that the prison was in the red due to the low rate of the contracts. However, they also mentioned that some of the decline in income came from the loss of labor due to injuries—not exactly a noble excuse.

<sup>94</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1876), 5.

it is important to recognize that when a large group of workers are commodified and sold in bulk under terms that are not their own, the value of their labor will be substantially reduced. From this recognition, we can begin to see more clearly why free labor would not want to compete or even be associated with a less valued group who made the same products, and why reformers saw contract convict labor as essentially wrong. Within the next two decades, the complaints of free labor and reformers became reasons for less demand among contractors.

While Harry Youngman focused on work within the prison, he was also concerned about the status of ex-inmates. As is the case even today, inmates of the late nineteenth century found their search for post-prison work quite challenging. “Let him go to work!” exclaims Youngman in his chapter on ex-inmates.<sup>95</sup> To Youngman, inmates like himself not only could do quality work, but they also wanted to be able to put that competence to use in the outside world. Youngman saw his group as a “class of unfortunates” who were denied access to the education and skills necessary to lead a valued law-abiding life, and then were faced with even more prejudice as they reentered the world with the stigma every ex-inmate carries.<sup>96</sup>

Youngman’s commentaries on work at the State Prison South are thoughtful and fairly extensive because work stood at the center of the inmate’s world. Work took up most of his day during his time in prison, and he knew work would probably be among his biggest concerns and challenges once released. We can assume that if other inmates did not have the same thoughts as Youngman, they at least pondered about work often and produced their own ideas on what would be best for them inside the prison and out,

---

<sup>95</sup> *State Prison Life: By One Who Has Been There*, 258.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

and what kind of changes should take place. Unfortunately for them, the changes they desired often came about very slowly or not at all.

Unlike a democratic society in which change often comes from the ground up, reform was very much a top-down phenomenon in Indiana's prisons. Consequently, inmates had very little control over their destiny, especially in the nineteenth century. This is not to say inmates did not fight back through disobedience or efforts to express their side of the story (like Youngman), but true change came from outside the bars. In the mid-1870s, prison officials had their first real questions about convict labor and the methods used to maintain productivity. In 1874, they began to rid the prison of what they assumed were its most degrading features. The state prison abandoned the "barbarous" striped uniforms that had garbed inmates for most of the century. Officials substituted instead a plain black suit. A brand of humanitarianism certainly lay at the base of this change but the chaplain's report reveals an unintended, yet pleasant, consequence in regards to the inmate's labor. The inmates, the chaplain explained, took on an "increased spirit of subordination," and they showed a "greater cheerfulness in performing work."<sup>97</sup> Cruel intentions or not, this was a new approach in the treatment of convict workers.

The basis of these officials' desire for change lies partly in their wish to separate the convict labor system from one their country abolished a little over a decade earlier, slavery. The change in prisoners' uniforms served as a step in this separation, but the method of punishing uncooperative inmates bothered many Hoosiers. In the late 1870s, the cat-o'-nine tails, a whipping device to punish inmates, was still used regularly in Indiana's prisons. Although they practiced the punishment, state prison officials

---

<sup>97</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1874), 9.

appealed to the governor and legislature to outlaw the cat as a blessing of sorts to institute new methods. The directors explained that Indiana's neighbors, Ohio and Illinois, both abolished the lash and that the cat "should be thrown aside as a relic of the dark ages and of human slavery. The husband no longer has the right to chastise his wife, the master his apprentice, nor the guardian his ward—flogging has been abolished in our navy years ago, and the whipping post law has long ceased to disgrace the penal statutes of this state."<sup>98</sup> As citizens of a northern and largely Republican state, many Hoosiers would have despised any connection to the American South.

Although it would take two decades for the lash to be completely abandoned, such appeals were a big step for inmate workers. Because most of their day was spent in a factory, sun-up to sun-down, it was likely that any punishment handed out was due to the inmate's conduct in the workplace. Despite relatively little change in their actual work, their punishment eventually became less corporal, and therefore less slave-like. However, the administration knew they walked a fine line in the disciplinary affairs of the prison. According to the directors in 1878, discipline was good at the state prison. They added, however, that "it has not been so excessively rigid as to make the prisoners feel that they were dumb animals or insensate machines."<sup>99</sup> The administration wanted good, subordinate workers who felt useful and respected.

The directors of State Prison South also expressed concern about the environment to which working inmates returned after their workday. For a while, the directors had asked for an appropriation from the state to provide electric lighting in the prison's cells. "Many cells," they complained, "are perfectly dark from the time the convict enters at

---

<sup>98</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1878), 5.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

five in the evening until he goes to his breakfast.” Inmates would work ten hours, essentially the hours of daylight, and return back to a pitch-black “unventilated cave.” The directors considered this situation not only harmful but also time wasting. They thought the inmates could use this time to read or partake in another form of entertainment until they fell asleep and “‘tired nature’s sweet restorer’ would refresh both the mind and body.”<sup>100</sup> The idea was to keep the inmate busy at all times. A full day of work followed by a few hours of educational activity and a rejuvenating night of rest would lead to a healthier, better-rested, smarter, and harder-working man. A dark stuffy cell retarded this process.

By no means was there agreement on the best daily regimen for a convict. While some officials advocated improvement upon the present “congregate system,” which had inmates working together during the day and in separate cells during the night, others like Warden Andrew Howard recommended an entire overhaul. For one, he wrote, the prisons that incorporated the congregate system “do not punish in a sufficient degree.” He also expressed his skepticism toward the supposed reformatory influence of the congregate system. Because the inmates are worked in gangs, he wrote, the more hardened “professional criminals” are able to corrupt the less severe criminals. Howard advocated the solitary system, the system that made Pennsylvania famous, which would completely separate inmates from any form of corruption and would establish a “loneliness” that, Howard said admiringly, “intensifies the punishment.” After the inmates served their time in such conditions, they would then work on a prison-run farm

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 9.

as “trusties.”<sup>101</sup> Howard cited the success of other countries that had incorporated the solitary framework. Such a system, he argued, would cost more, but in the long run would lead to fewer inmates and therefore fewer state dependents.<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately for Howard, Indiana’s problems with overcrowding erased the small chance of his system being adopted.

Whatever the system used, the goal was to rehabilitate the convict to the point where he could be reintroduced into society. As with today, this proved difficult to measure. A variety of adjectives were used to describe a reformed inmate. Moral Instructor M.W. Painter, for example, wrote that in order become fully rehabilitated, an inmate must be “honest, industrious, and temperate in their living.”<sup>103</sup> Others may have chosen a different set of adjectives to use, but one word in particular was consistently included among the qualities of a rehabilitated inmate: Industriousness. If industriousness was one of the primary goals for inmates, it meant incoming convicts were viewed as non-industrious. This is important in understanding late nineteenth-century penology. Essentially, the inmate was sent to a penal institution at least partly due to his inability to work, whether that came from lack of skill or just laziness. During his stay at the prison, the hope was to instill a work ethic in him that would lead to success and lawful behavior on the outside.

Work had a place in the financial, disciplinary, and rehabilitative facets of the prison, and this would continue. But as time progressed, and Indiana carried on its quest to fully realize its promise to shed the “vindictive” side of the prison, Hoosiers attempted

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>102</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1880), 25.

<sup>103</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1881), 16.

to redefine work as solely a positive and rehabilitative tool. This certainly did not happen overnight, but as with the many reforms described in the first chapter, the process began in the late nineteenth century. To Indiana's late nineteenth-century prison officials, work contained a certain mystical element that tapped into the very root of a man. In 1888, the directors of Prison North described the effects of work on the inmate's mind and body. Work not only kept the mind busy and produced a "cheery feeling," but it also guided the inmate "toward unity and harmony of all that is best in his nature." The times when the inmate was not working, Sundays and evenings after work, were the "periods of greatest danger."<sup>104</sup> These periods were simply interruptions in the reformatory process. During these periods, inmates were encouraged to read.

Redefining convict labor was not an easy process, nor a linear one for that matter. As Indiana approached the turn of the twentieth century, Hoosiers became increasingly aware of the changing economic character of the state, and with it, the rise of labor organizations. For years, trade unions had complained about the indiscriminate use of convict labor around the country. It was only a matter of time before they made their presence felt in Indiana. Trade unions, along with many manufacturers, argued that contract convict labor often competed unfairly with free labor, driving down wages and the price of goods. Those associated with Indiana's prisons often sympathized with free labor's grievances. By 1886, the directors of Prison North recognized the magnitude of the convict labor problem, explaining to the governor that contract labor was "radically wrong" and free labor's protest against it was "one of the marked industrial movements

---

<sup>104</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1888), 11.

of the day.”<sup>105</sup> In sum, Hoosiers’ redefinition of convict labor would come about both in terms of the inmates and in terms of free labor.

In 1886, both the board of directors and Warden Howard of State Prison South attacked the issue of convict labor in their reports to the governor. The board was particularly concerned with the low price of convict labor included in the new contracts. The low quality of manufacturing facilities contributed partly to the lack of interest in prison contracts, but the directors recognized another reason, the unpopularity of convict labor itself. Free labor movements, they said, had “militated against the re-letting of contracts,” and had led to the threat of boycotting convict labor products.<sup>106</sup> Warden Howard reiterated his disdain for the contract labor system and explained that organizations like the National Prison Congress and various commissions of charities had opposed the system for years. Although he recognized the implications that elimination of the contract system would have for the state treasury, he knew that some change was in order. As in previous years, he continued to push his “industry with separation” plan.<sup>107</sup>

The “convict labor problem,” as it would be known, proved a very complex one for Hoosiers. On one hand, work became increasingly linked to rehabilitation and the acquisition of skill in an industrial world, but on the other hand, Hoosiers knew that convict labor unfairly competed with free labor. How was one to replace a system that was so vital? The “problem” would plague the Indiana penal system for decades.

---

<sup>105</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1886), 9.

<sup>106</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Jeffersonville: Indiana State Prison South, 1887), 7.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-20.



From the inmate perspective, the fruits of reformers' efforts appeared largely nonexistent. An investigation of State Prison South revealed some appalling anecdotes of brutal working conditions. Some inmates were just not fit for their assigned work. One inmate in particular, from Vanderburgh county, was placed in the foundry. When he could not do the required work, guards proceeded to punish him "almost constantly" for two years with a combination of flogging and time in the "cage." Another inmate, an African American named Oscar Snowden, was assigned along with another inmate to "mind three mills." In the winter, his wheelbarrow's wheel often froze and interfered with his work. When he could not keep up, guards hung him up by his wrists for twenty minutes and then flogged him. Furthermore, Snowden's hands became so "calloused and cracked" that they would bleed in the morning after opening them. Guards and foremen showed no mercy even to the younger inmates. A "pointer boy" in the foundry made his way to the hospital after his assigned work made him ill. The following morning, he was punished and made to carry a sand bag all day while receiving one piece of cornbread every twenty-four hours. Arguably the worst report involved an inmate named Ike Little who actually died "four or five months ago" as a result of mismanagement. Ike, like many of his fellow inmate workers, eventually became incapable of completing his work in the mill due to lung damage from the dust. On top of the punishment he received, the doctor continued to send him back to work, two or three times, until he spit up clots of blood, and then finally fell over dead.

Other reports revealed the intimate relationship between the prison's officers and the contractors. One official witnessed the warden disbanding the line for sick call and sending the men back to work in their poor state. True, probably some inmates did what

they could to get out of work or cut corners, but the prison's management seldom gave them the benefit of the doubt. On one particularly unpleasant day, the contractors made a bad mixture of iron. With such a bad batch, the inmates found it nearly "impossible to make good work." Consequently, "a great many were reported and punished the next morning."<sup>108</sup> Such practices revealed the gap between reform theory and practice.

Like Harry Youngman, who served two decades before him, Leon Hoffman chronicled his experience in the Indiana prison system in a book he entitled *A History of Blasted Hopes*. Hoffman served at Michigan City throughout most of the 1890s. After being introduced to such prison features as the small plumbing-less cells, the lockstep formation, and "bootleg" coffee, he was quickly initiated into the convict labor experience. Hoffman was assigned to a clothing factory in which he was required to make forty-eight socks a day, a challenging task especially for a beginner. He too described these factories as "sweatshops," in which inmates were ordered to do "unreasonable tasks" or else they were thrown in the dungeon, or "hole," where one could spend weeks lying on a stone floor with only "a thin hickory shirt and pair of pants," and a daily ration consisting of a quart of water and a stale piece of cornbread. Hoffman explained that an inmate could easily be sent to the dungeon for not being able to make six-dozen shirts in a day.<sup>109</sup> Although Hoffman's description of prison life alone served as a useful tool for reformers to use in bringing corruption in the penal system to light, Hoffman had his own ideas as to what reforms should be implemented. Besides the

---

<sup>108</sup> Committee On Penal and Reformatory Institutions of the Board of State Charities, *Investigation of Mismanagement Charges, State Prison South*. (1894), Indiana State Archives, Box GG #025078 "State Board of Charities, Thomas Murray Investigation, Prisoner's Letter." Folder: Investigation of Indiana State Prison South -- Cruelty Charge 1894.

<sup>109</sup> Leon Hoffman, *A History of Blasted Hopes, or Eleven Years in an Indiana State Prison* (Self-Published, 1904), 57, 63-65, 81, 89.

obvious condemnations of torture and overwork, Hoffman recommended that convicts be paid for their work in order to prepare them for freedom. He also thought that convict-made products should be marked as such and that parole should be extended to criminals of “all classes except murder.” Hoffman believed there was no reason to keep a man incarcerated for life.<sup>110</sup> Luckily for his successors, reformers had some of the same ideas as Hoffman.

In 1898, prison officials met with labor representatives to form a Convict Labor Conference. Together they came up with a plan for convict labor that included a maximum eight-hour workday, a significant limit on the number of inmates contracted out, limits on the number of men allowed to work in a single trade, an agreement to advance technical and educational training, and an agreement to allow the leasing of land for farming.<sup>111</sup> The conference had no real power in terms of passing legislation, but such motions aided in the push for real reform. Eventually the conference’s plan became a reality.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, Indiana continued its quest to accommodate the rising number of inmates while maintaining a rehabilitation-based penal system. After State Prison South’s 1897 conversion into the Indiana Reformatory came a new sense of purpose. As had been the case during most of the nineteenth century, labor served as a cornerstone in the institution’s foundation. However, with the introduction of the reformatory, the reasoning behind the use of convict labor revolved more than ever around rehabilitation, training, and education. Among other new programs such as a more organized school, sprouted a wage earning system that,

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>111</sup> “Plan for Convict Labor,” *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 17, 1898. In the late nineteenth century, the average workday for an inmate was at least nine hours long.

according to the administration, allowed for a more real-life working experience. Under this system, inmates would use their wages to purchase their room, board, and other expenses. The idea was simple: A wage-based work experience that revolved around self-reliance, responsibility, and the “habits of industry” would prepare them for a successful life in the outside world.<sup>112</sup> “Men in this reformatory are required to earn their own living,” wrote Superintendent Alvin Hert. Before an inmate could be paroled and released to the outside, he was required to have a certain amount of savings to his credit. To help him keep track, the Reformatory supplied him with an account book which would prepare him “for intelligent business methods on the outside.”<sup>113</sup> Wage work and an account book together gave the inmate a solid foundation for his return to a modern industrial and consumer society.

One of the main characteristics of the Reformatory that set it apart from traditional penal institutions was its series of trade schools designed to provide the inmate with a skill and “equip the individual for citizenship.”<sup>114</sup> Reformers had pushed for trade schools for a while. In 1892 for example, a year of business depression and general idleness among the inmates, the warden of State Prison North suggested a trade school that would “teach handicrafts” and “engage both head and hand.”<sup>115</sup> By 1900, the Reformatory had developed trade schools for printing, painting and glazing, machinery, woodwork and carpentering, tinwork, and plant care. The board of managers emphasized that the reformatory should be treated like any other benevolent or educational institution

---

<sup>112</sup> *First Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1896-1897), 4-10.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>114</sup> *Second Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1899-1900), 6-7.

<sup>115</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1892), 19-20.

and that the state should not expect a profit from its operation. The board was blatantly against any contract labor that would come into competition with free labor. “Work should never be made penal,” they continued, “for work is one of the greatest blessings mankind has received.” Work was to serve as education, and the only punishment that should be expected was “loss of liberty.”<sup>116</sup>

The board’s sentiments represented a significant shift in penological thought. The “work as a blessing” approach in which the inmate could take some kind of interest differed substantially in comparison to the majority of nineteenth century penology when prisons used work as a multifaceted tool to keep the facility running and the inmates busy. Labor as a rehabilitative device was not new, but labor as a purely rewarding and educational tool was. In the past labor was viewed as rehabilitative in the sense that a solitary cell and a bland diet were rehabilitative. That is to say, early prisons incorporated labor as a relatively humanitarian form of punishment, gentler than corporal punishment and more useful than idleness, that was forced upon the inmates but was, at the same time, good for them in the sense they would leave better men. Now labor was seen as a positive reinforcement, an educational experience for which inmates were paid and taught a useful skill at the same time. Punishment had no place in work. With any luck, the Reformatory would, as one concerned Hoosier put it, take “thieves and other criminals” and mold them into “laborers and artisans” who make decent wages on the outside.<sup>117</sup>

Before this transition could take place, though, contract labor had to be phased out. The General Assembly had actually abolished contract labor in 1897, but as Warden

---

<sup>116</sup> *Second Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1899-1900), 6-7.

<sup>117</sup> “Two in a Cell,” *Indianapolis News*, Jan. 12, 1899 (letter to the editor).

Charley Harley of the State Prison in Michigan City explained in his report, the legislators provided no appropriation to fully implement a new and successful system. Although contracts were limited to an extent, both the State Prison and the Reformatory were forced to keep extending them over the next couple of decades until they found a permanent solution. Harley supported the idea of a farm where inmates could perform the least competitive work possible.<sup>118</sup> Harley would not be the last figure to advocate farm work for inmates.

The discussion concerning the Reformatory continued to revolve around the trade schools. Chaplain W.W. Comfort gave an address to the Mayflower Congregational Church in Indianapolis in an effort to educate the public about the work of the Reformatory's inmates. "I want to say to you that there are no drones in our hive," the chaplain told his audience. "Many men came to the institution with that loathsome disease called laziness, but it is swiftly and surely eradicated." At the time, the Reformatory still had inmates working under three contracts making shoes, pants, and hollowware. The chaplain explained that after these contracts expired, the state would sign no more as the Reformatory would adopt a trade school program.<sup>119</sup>

The Reformatory could not work at its full potential, Superintendent W.H. Hart explained, until all of the labor contracts had expired and trade schools were substituted in their stead. Obtaining a skill through the trade school could alter "all the habits of his [the inmate's] life" and insert him "in the category of skilled workmen such as are

---

<sup>118</sup> *Biannual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1896-1898), 17-21.

<sup>119</sup> "Work among Criminals," *Indianapolis Journal*, Oct. 29, 1900.

constantly in demand.”<sup>120</sup> The desire to move beyond contract labor implied that the root of these inmates’ problems was more than just a lack of industriousness. Now inmates needed skill.

The secretary of the Board of State Charities, Amos Butler, attributed many of the inmates’ “defects” to an early trauma in their family life. Furthermore, at least half of the inmates in his study had not reached fourth grade, were unemployed when they committed their crime, used alcohol and cigarettes, and did not attend Sunday School. Many of the inmates, he said, lacked physical training, probably best shown by their “stooping shoulders, awkward arms and shambling gait.” Only an intense training of the mind and body could repair these men after years of broken families, little education, and unemployment.<sup>121</sup> The trade school with its educational and physical features could provide this type of training. At the Reformatory, inmates would finally partake for the first time in wholesome skilled work.

While the General Assembly and Indiana’s prison officials explored possible budget-friendly alternatives to contract labor, the voices of labor and manufacturers gradually became louder. In 1903, a joint committee made up of both organized labor and manufacturing representatives made clear their position on convict labor. In their opinion, the labor of the state’s 1,800 convicts served only the exploitative interests of a few contractors. Beyond that, these contractors forced convicts such as the chain workers at Jeffersonville to do much more work for thirty or forty cents per day than a free laborer who made four or five dollars per day. The shirt and sock makers at Michigan City, they

---

<sup>120</sup> *Second Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1899-1900), 13.

<sup>121</sup> “Report of Secretary of Indiana Board of State Charities before N.E.A. At Detroit,” *Indianapolis Journal*, July 13, 1901.

wrote, competed with sweatshops and contributed to the “degrading of free industry.” The contract labor system, or a “slave system” as the committee called it, hurt both free labor and the factories that employed free labor. Because the convict “owes a debt to the community,” they continued, the community should receive the benefits from the convict’s labor. In their report, the committee members also included a plan to solve the convict labor dilemma. Because the demand for county highways continued to rise in the state, the building of roads seemed to be a proper and relevant task to which to apply convict labor. “Free rural delivery, the automobile, and the modern demand for quick delivery of commodities,” the committee wrote, made good roads in the country essential. If not employed in the actual laying of roads, convicts could at least be put to work mining road material like shale or manufacturing brick and macadam.<sup>122</sup>

Roadwork might have solved the convict labor problem, but many reformers considered such public menial labor to be degrading to the inmates. They supported instead expansion of the trade schools that had already been launched. In 1904, Superintendent William Whittaker expanded upon the philosophy behind the inmates’ trade school work. The quantity of goods produced at the Reformatory was not necessarily important, Whittaker wrote, hence there was no need for large mass-producing machines. The focus instead was to be placed on quality products in the hope that the state’s institutions and private firms would “prefer them to machine made articles.”<sup>123</sup> Such statements assume the inferiority of mass-produced goods and imply a desire to create traditional craftsmen out of the Reformatory’s inmates.

---

<sup>122</sup> B.B. Schmidt, E.H. Davis and Edgar Perkins, *The Position of Organized Labor and Indiana Manufacturers on the Convict Labor Question* (Indianapolis: To the General Assembly, 1903), 1-4.

<sup>123</sup> *Fourth Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1903-1904), 11.



The same year, State Agent James Comfort also advanced the push for trade school expansion. Farm hands, he wrote, were in demand to some extent, but they worked only seasonally, and unskilled workers were always in high supply. Skilled workers were the only ones who had no trouble at all finding work any time of the year.<sup>124</sup> For this reason, it made sense to provide inmates with the skills that would give them the greatest chance of success on the outside.

Although the Reformatory could never really lose its classification as a prison, it did provide a unique educational experience for its inhabitants. Warden Whittaker boasted of the Reformatory's large facilities and variety of equipment, explaining that "no outside school or shop can so well supply the necessary means of instruction."<sup>125</sup> The Reformatory had access to capital and resources that a private enterprise or educational facility did not, so in some respect, inmates could receive a better education under the right circumstances.

In 1905, the Indiana General Assembly ordered all labor contracts of the Reformatory to be cancelled by July 1906, but the board of managers and contractors agreed to end the contracts the same year, allowing for an early commitment the trade school program. The *Indianapolis News* reported that foundry workers' wages would rise from forty cents per day to sixty. In addition to trades related to stone, cement, mops, brooms, painting, decorating, woodwork, printing, machinery, electricity, tinware, tailoring, and music, Superintendent Whittaker told the *News* that the Reformatory planned to develop new trades like barbering and laundry. "With the canceling of all the

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>125</sup> *Fifth Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1905-1906), 9-15.

old labor contracts,” Whittaker said, “the institution will be placed on a basis for reformatory work for the first time in its history.”<sup>126</sup>

The General Assembly’s action greatly pleased the Reformatory’s administration. Superintendent Whittaker wrote that the cancellation of contracts and the establishment of trade schools, the school of letters, and the state-account system “has been the means of placing the institution upon a high plane, and with further encouragement by the incoming legislature, the future for practical work along lines of making good citizens out of a majority of those sent to us is bright.”<sup>127</sup>

The cancellation of contracts, however, did not solve all of the Reformatory’s troubles. For one, the 1905 cancellation did not end contract labor. It simply allowed for new contracts under better terms and a more complete commitment to the trade schools. As late as 1918, over 37 percent of the Reformatory’s inmates were under contract. But even Reformatory-controlled shops caused problems. The Reformatory maintained business relations with the private sphere in buying materiel and selling excess product. For example, on November 5, 1905, control of the hollowware and chain shops passed from the private contractors to the state, but a competing chain manufacturer brought suit against the managers of the Indiana Reformatory arguing there was no need for a chain factory there when the Reformatory never used more than \$5,000 worth of chains.<sup>128</sup> In a time when Indiana’s prisons were supposed to be moving toward a state-use system, the Reformatory’s chain factory served as an example for those wishing to expose the

---

<sup>126</sup> “Trade Schools at the Reformatory,” *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 14, 1905.

<sup>127</sup> *Fifth Biennial Report of the Board of Mangers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1905-1906), 9-15.

<sup>128</sup> “Contract in Violation of Convict Labor Law,” *Indianapolis News*, Nov. 13, 1905; “Convict Labor Is Now Utilized by the State,” *Indianapolis News*, Nov. 5, 1905.

exploitative practices of contractors and prison management.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, to the Reformatory's administration the preservation of the chain factory served simply as a temporary transitional tool on the path to a better system.

As for the State Prison at Michigan City, the focus lay less on education and training there than at other institutions. As one official in 1918 put it, the State Prison's main purpose was custodial, disciplinary, and industrial.<sup>130</sup> Since the State Prison housed older and more serious criminals, a fully rehabilitated inmate seemed less likely. Despite the difference in ultimate purpose, the State Prison still attempted to separate itself from the contract labor system. Many Hoosiers thought they had solved the convict labor problem at the State Prison when the state installed a binder twine plant in 1906. The plant, largely based on the Minnesota model, was designed to provide cheap twine for Indiana farmers who, in the past, had depended on "trust-made twine" from out of state.<sup>131</sup>

After the installation, those connected with the prison along with the farmers themselves campaigned to increase patronage of the convict-made twine. In a 1911 letter to the editor, a man pleaded for his fellow Hoosiers to step up their support of the binder twine program after a disappointing year in which the state lost money. He said the State Prison's plant had brought the price of twine down from twelve or thirteen cents per pound to a little over six.<sup>132</sup> In 1912, an official from Michigan City told the newspaper that the State Prison was in the process of beginning a large advertisement campaign. To

---

<sup>129</sup> "Chain Manufacturer Sues Indiana Reformatory," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 26, 1905.

<sup>130</sup> Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions, *Special Report on Prison Labor*. (1918), Indiana State Archives, Box 00 #025086, "Reports From Committees on: Prison Labor 1917, Penal and Reformatory 1918 and 1928," Folder: Report of State Committee on Prison Labor 1917, #3.

<sup>131</sup> "Plant at State Prison Will Make Binder Twine," *Indianapolis Star*, Jan. 21, 1906.

<sup>132</sup> "Binding Twine," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 16, 1911.

run the campaign, they purchased additional typewriters and sent out tens of thousands of letters in an effort to “reach every farmer in Indiana” and even a considerable number of farmers in neighboring states. The State Prison estimated that if Indiana farmers used the convict-twine, which ran about two cents per pound cheaper than the market price, they could save in excess of \$60,000 total.<sup>133</sup> The twine factory aided greatly in loosening contractors’ grip on the State Prison, but the prison’s relationship with the private sphere continued with the help of the General Assembly and its action such as the 1909 law to extend contracts until 1920. By 1918, over 45 percent of the State Prison’s inmates were on contract. Some workers, such as those in the shirt and fibre furniture operations, were under what was called the piece-price plan. The more desirable state account ventures included the street sign, shoe, and clothing shops.<sup>134</sup>

Along with the groundbreaking changes in inmate work and education, Indiana committed itself to the indeterminate sentencing and parole programs, both of which had their debut in 1897. According to Warden Hart, the parole system in place at the Reformatory showed signs of success in its early years. Only 19 percent of the parole cases were deemed unsatisfactory, and only 8 percent of the men returned to the Reformatory. Hart put this trend in monetary terms. As consumers, the would-be incarcerated men would have cost around \$59,000, but as producing parolees, they earned about \$127,000, which they could then distribute into local economies around the

---

<sup>133</sup> “Farmers Buy All the Twine Made at Prison,” *Indianapolis News*, July 23, 1912.

<sup>134</sup> Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions, *Prison Industries* (1918), Indiana State Archives, Box OO #025086, “Reports From Committees On: Prison Labor 1917, Penal and Reformatory 1918 and 1928,” Folder: Report of Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions 1918.

state.<sup>135</sup> Employers were happy to take on parolees, Hart wrote, because they were held to strict laws concerning steady employment, intoxication, and “evil associations.”<sup>136</sup>

Behind indeterminate sentencing and parole stood a desire to treat each inmate individually by basing their sentence and release on their character and progress. Rather than rely on arbitrary sentences determined by the crime, parole boards now returned convicts to society when they were truly ready. To determine this readiness, boards incorporated a new grading and scoring system, which depended largely on the inmates’ performance at their job.<sup>137</sup> According to Warden Whittaker, work was vital to discipline, reformation, and the development of a man. “Every department of the institution should be a workshop,” he wrote, to prepare the inmate for work experience on the outside.<sup>138</sup> Officers looked to the grading system to ensure that the inmate “takes interest in the work assigned to him” and remains “steadily employed.” The inmate was to show that he could master his trade and was rated by the level of skill with which he performed his work.<sup>139</sup>

In 1907, a school official, George Asbury, clarified how skill was to be scored at the Reformatory. He used the example of the printing school. A beginner would be placed in an elementary class of work such as typesetter, where he would be trained and then evaluated in a “grade book.” The inmate would then move on to the class of pressman, in which he experienced the same process. Finally, the inmate entered the last

---

<sup>135</sup> *Second Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1899-1900), 15-16.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>137</sup> *Papers Read before the Officers of the Indiana Reformatory at Their Monthly Meetings* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1907), 3-5.

<sup>138</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1907), 9.

<sup>139</sup> *Papers Read before the Officers of the Indiana Reformatory at Their Monthly Meetings*, 3-5.

stage of the trade after which he could be considered a printer. The grading system was based on a percentage scale ranging from 30 to 100 percent. The inmate was required to receive a 75 percent or higher in order to advance to the next class of work.<sup>140</sup> The inmate's grade book served as an important tool in the board of managers' decision whether or not to parole the inmate. At the same time, the inmate's work and conduct served as a tool with which to measure the Reformatory's value as a whole.<sup>141</sup>

To the administration, the grading system also was expected to aid in the discipline of inmates. School of Letters official M.M. Barnard explained that in the past, the inmate felt he was only working for the labor contractors. The new system allowed for more responsibility to be placed upon the inmate himself through wage labor, school, and military drill.<sup>142</sup> Barnard added that although discipline should remain firm, minor infractions should be overlooked if the inmates are industrious and keep a clean shop.

Along with the trade schools, the prison administration wished to expand the School of Letters in order to fully reform the criminal's "head, hand, and heart." New classes still fell under the two main categories of arithmetic and language, but they incorporated less traditional instruction in correspondence and grammar. Interestingly enough, inmates often met such educational efforts with resistance for a couple of reasons. For one, inmates saw the schools as a waste of time and not exactly rewarding. After hours locked in a cell, the last thing they wanted was to be locked in a classroom. Secondly, for every hour they spent in the classroom, they missed out on part of the

---

<sup>140</sup> *Ideas on Reformation: Papers Prepared and Read by Officers and Instructors in the Indiana Reformatory at Their Monthly Meetings* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory Printing Trade School, 1907), 11-12.

<sup>141</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1908), 8.

<sup>142</sup> *Ideas on Reformation*, 80.

wages they would earn from working. “There is a disposition on the part of many young men to become impatient to get to work,” wrote the head of the school, George Asbury, and “some inmates think school is not work.”<sup>143</sup> To the inmates, a transition to a trade school and skill-based model was one thing, but a transition to a model that required hours in a traditional classroom was quite another.

With the indeterminate sentence, parole, trade schools, school of letters, and the grading system, Hoosiers hoped to provide correctional institutions that worked “with nature and society, and not against them.” The inmates of these institutions had deviated from society’s norms and, to an extent, had to be separated in order to correct their behavior. However, while prisons of the early nineteenth century considered it best to completely separate inmates from the corruption and disarray of society and provide an isolated, behavior-correcting environment, prisons of the early twentieth century sought a more integrated experience for inmates with a comfortable, yet adaptable, flow between the institution and larger society. As with much of United States prison history, the intentions of theoreticians could not make up for the obvious obstacles built into the prison framework. Although the new penology may have more fully embodied broader society’s values concerning work, it could have never provided the ideal educational and working experience for an inmate when he or she was forced to do labor for little pay while surrounded by other corrupted, or at least less-than-ideal, living- and workmates.<sup>144</sup>

With the reformatory model just over a decade old, Hoosiers looked for signs of success or failure. In 1910 a representative of the *Indianapolis News*, John Ketcham, visited the Reformatory and returned with a positive report. He seemed impressed by the

---

<sup>143</sup> *Papers Read before the Officers of the Indiana Reformatory at Their Monthly Meetings*, 8-14.

<sup>144</sup> Samuel Fallows, *Do Reformatories Reform?* (Jeffersonville: President of Board of Managers--Illinois State Reformatory, 1907), 4.

work of the inmates. "Activity seems to prevail anywhere," he said. Ninety-five percent of the inmates were "industrious," and most were "eager to make overtime." Ketcham reported the classes of workers he saw in a particular foundry: 166 molders, sixteen laborers, thirteen cupola men, and four apprentices. Together, he continued, they "melded 68,500 pounds of iron" and completed 5,140 pieces while only losing 350. According to Ketcham, a local locomotive company went through about five hundred men before gathering one hundred good workers, but the Reformatory could beat this one-out-of-five ratio with no problem. Ketcham was struck by the skill and "dexterity" of the shirt-makers. His observations, along with the 75 percent positive parole rate, verified the success of the trade school plan. Such a plan worked much better, Ketcham added, than the road gangs of the South, which demoralize the boys and give them no trade whatsoever.<sup>145</sup> Rather than use work as a tool for punishment and shame, the Reformatory appeared to empower the inmates by placing them in a state-of-the-art facility and teaching them to do work in which they could take pride.

As participants in the experiment, the administrators of the Reformatory had a predictably optimistic outlook on its value. Because of the improved character of the inmates' work and general demeanor, Assistant Superintendent Leon Leaf went so far as to say, "It is no longer a question as to whether the reformatory principle will be a success."<sup>146</sup> Superintendent David Peyton attributed the inmates' superior morale to the Reformatory's policy "treat them more like free workmen than convicts."<sup>147</sup> However, Peyton still felt troubled by continued competition with free labor. The ideal system, he

---

<sup>145</sup> "Praises Conditions at Indiana Reformatory," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 20, 1910.

<sup>146</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1910), 6.

<sup>147</sup> "Prison South Called 'Jeff' Contract System," 191?, Indiana State Archives, Box Unnumbered "Board of State Charities, Prison Reform, Parole Laws," Folder: Jeffersonville State Prison Newspaper Clippings.



said, would include a “large school of scientific or intensive farming” in which inmates would learn the “most useful trade.” After all, a large portion of the boys and men at the Reformatory came from farms and would return after their sentence. Peyton called this a “co-operative plan” in the sense that the state would simply provide basic management while the inmates worked the farm and retained much of their earnings.<sup>148</sup> The farm idea would become more and more popular in following years for a variety of reasons.

In the meantime, support for the expansion of manufacturing-based trade schools continued. In 1911, the School and Library Department recommended an expansion of classes to include instruction like that of “recognized trade-schools.” Learning a trade, they said, “would undoubtedly result in much moral gain.”<sup>149</sup> R.B. von KleinSmid, head of the departments of research and sociology, said the trade schools needed more qualified instructors who were specialists in their field and had “not only practical training, but the theoretical understanding of the various principles involved in the manufacturing industries.” A machinist trade school, KleinSmid added, would allow inmates to enter one of the Midwest’s most demanded industries.<sup>150</sup> By upping the ante in the Reformatory experiment, KleinSmid and company predicted a larger return in the form of more skilled and more moral citizens.

Both competing manufacturers and labor organizations continued to criticize Indiana’s prisons. Some of the most vocal complaints came from clothing manufacturers and cooperage companies. The National Association of Shirt and Overall Manufacturers had multiple grievances concerning the contract labor system. First, they complained that

---

<sup>148</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1911), 4.

<sup>149</sup> *Annual Report of the Officers and Directors* (Michigan City: Indiana State Prison North, 1911), 52.

<sup>150</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory* (Jeffersonville: Indiana Reformatory, 1913), 11-12.

a large corporation, partly controlled by an Indiana judge, held numerous prison contracts in fourteen states. Furthermore, the association continued, the Reformatory's board of managers had unjustly signed a new contract despite the supposed 1906 abolition of the contract system. The association's businesses, with its free labor, competed with prison made goods about three times cheaper than theirs.<sup>151</sup> Unlike regular manufacturers, prison contractors not only received a cheap labor force, but they also had the free, state-funded use of buildings, machinery, power, transport, and so on.

The Omaha Cooperage Company, echoing the same sort of complaints, explained that the cost of living had increased significantly in 1910 and that there was no way it could compete with Indiana's prison-made barrels. Two more cooperage companies, Vigo Cooperage Co. and Davis Cooperage Co., objected to the fact that they paid their workers at least two dollars per day when inmates worked for 42.5 cents.<sup>152</sup> Some of these manufacturers' grievances offer insight into gender roles around the turn of the century. For example, a Terre Haute clothing manufacturer, Stahl Urban and Co., explained that an inmate learned virtually nothing by making pants and shirts in prison. On the outside, garment making was women's work. "Is it fair to the convict who does want to lead an honest life," they asked, "to teach him a trade that is of absolutely no value to him?" A freed man "cannot work a woman's job."<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> W.T. Steward to B. Kronthal and Co., Dec. 3, 1910, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Marshall), Box 86, Folder 3.

<sup>152</sup> M.D. Welch to Governor Marshall, March 31, 1910, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Marshall), Box 86, Folder 3; H.S. Beuson to Governor Marshall, March 26, 1910, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Marshall), Box 86, Folder 3; Davis Cooperage Co. to Governor Marshall, March 26, 1910, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Marshall), Box 86, Folder 3.

<sup>153</sup> Stahl Urban and Co. to Governor Marshall, March 30, 1910, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Marshall), Box 86, Folder 3.

Free labor grievances came from a variety of angles. The Indiana State Conference of Bricklayers' and Stonemasons' International Union, for example, condemned the use of convict labor in the "construction of walls and other building work at the different state institutions," and declared that all future work should be "performed by free men and taxpayers."<sup>154</sup> In the same year, Governor Marshall also received complaints from the United Garment Workers of America; these included some of the points made by the clothing manufacturers.

At times, prison officials thought the complaints and petitions from labor were manufactured by big business to secure their market. Superintendent Peyton made a point to write the governor concerning a supposed petition from the workers of the S.G. Taylor Chain Company. He said the "chain trust" instigated the petition and essentially pushed the employees to provide their signatures.<sup>155</sup> In general, however, it seemed that public servants were at least partly sympathetic with labor. Even Governor James Goodrich let the Printers' Union of Indiana know that unions had his full sympathy. "I carried a union card myself for ten years," he added.<sup>156</sup> But despite contract labor's general unpopularity, it served as a lesser evil in comparison to idleness among inmates.

A more detailed evaluation of prison labor came when a special committee of the State Federation of Labor visited the State Prison and Reformatory. Although it was not the intention of the committee to vilify the administrations of those institutions, "as wage earners" they felt justified in inspecting prison labor critically and making their own

---

<sup>154</sup> Indiana State Conference of Bricklayers' and Stonemasons' International Union to Governor Marshall, Oct. 4, 1909, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Marshall), Box 86, Folder 4.

<sup>155</sup> D.C. Peyton to Governor Marshall, Aug. 13, 1909, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Marshall), Box 87, Folder 4.

<sup>156</sup> Governor James Goodrich to Rev. W.J. Sayers, 1918, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Goodrich), Box 145, Folder 4.

recommendations. On the top of their list of recommendations was the abolition of the shirt-making contract, which they argued only hurt both the inmates and industry. They also gave suggestions concerning the trade school. A member of the committee, O.P. Smith, gave his observations from a molder's perspective. He said the tasks given to inmate molders were far too much and that they should not be expected to maintain such pace and quality of work day in and day out. Along with the other jobs in the prison, Smith and the committee thought that quotas for the molders should be based on "minimum productive capacity," not maximum. Although the purpose of the trade schools was to provide inmates with the skills needed to find work outside, Smith asserted confidently that there was "not a man in the reformatory that could hold a job in a stove shop." Very little of the inmates' experience, Smith continued, could be utilized on the outside, and the type of work in general offered a "poor conception of free foundries."<sup>157</sup>

A Terre Haute labor leader, Philip K. Reinbold, also condemned Indiana's use of convict labor. "Corporations holding labor contracts," said Reinbold, "set the daily task of convicts so high that it is practically impossible for them to get in any extra work for which they would be paid cash." Inmates were supplied with unsatisfactory material and machines, and if they could not complete the required quota, they were sent to the "hole," where they experienced ironbound gloves, a torturous diet, and swollen legs (from standing for two or so days). To Reinbold, the trade school was a "farce" and a school in name only. He said that a boy might learn a small skill, like sewing the front of a shirt or wiring a broom, but he would then remain at that job for the duration of his stay, never

---

<sup>157</sup> "System of Labor at Prisons Condemned," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 7, 1910.

really learning a full trade.<sup>158</sup> From the labor representatives' perspective, not much had changed since the introduction of the so-called state-account system. Inmates were still unskilled, still overworked, and still competition for free labor.

Despite the intensity of free labor's objections, certainly not everyone agreed with their position. From the initial phasing out of contract labor in 1897 until well into the second decade of the twentieth century, some Hoosiers saw no reason for using a state-supported labor system. Those in favor of the traditional contract labor system often argued on three fronts. First, they saw competition simply as a reality of life, and believed there was really no way to avoid it. One concerned Hoosier wrote in his letter to the editor, "I am forced to the conclusion that so long as a man stays on the earth and does anything, either on the inside of a prison or the outside, he is in competition with someone else." According to him, the contract system, if run on proper business principles, made the most sense to the general taxpayer, and there was no need to adopt such an inefficient and costly scheme as the state-use system.<sup>159</sup> In a critical commentary on a bill that would subject out-of-state convict goods to local laws, Warden Edward Fogarty wrote, "competition does not begin in the market place," and "very often it is the case that a man who is opposing convict labor is the same man who bid for the labor and did not get it."<sup>160</sup> Fogarty added later that contractors had not made a significant profit in years.<sup>161</sup>

Secondly, some Hoosiers pointed to the small number of inmates (2,300) in comparison to the general population (2,700,000) and argued that convict labor in no way

---

<sup>158</sup> "Chairman of Federation of Labor Committee Criticizes Conditions," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 5, 1910.

<sup>159</sup> "The Convict Labor Problem," *Indianapolis Journal*, Feb. 13, 1899 (letter to the editor).

<sup>160</sup> "Opposes Bill Aimed at Convict Made Goods," *Indianapolis News*, April 2, 1914.

<sup>161</sup> "Commission Is Named to Study Prison Labor," *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 27, 1916.

could substantially affect the economy, much less “demoralize” a labor market. One letter to the editor told readers that recent studies had shown that the effect of convict competition was “much less than is generally thought.” He cited an Ohio penal expert who figured that the goods produced by convict labor make up 52/100 of 1 percent of all goods.<sup>162</sup> Lastly, some thought contractors deserved the advantages they had. Warden James Reid attempted to justify the supposedly unfair competition caused of the contract labor system, explaining that contractors took on an unusual amount of risk with the prison’s ever-shifting inmate population, its circulation of management, the requirement of using an often less-than-qualified inmate work force, and the inability to discharge inmate employees.<sup>163</sup>

Whether or not inmate labor had a damaging effect on free labor cannot be proven, but by the first decade of the twentieth century, a purely contract-based labor system had become too unpopular and politically impractical to maintain. Indiana had committed itself, at least partly, to the state-account system, and there was no turning back. Further development of Indiana’s convict labor system would center on the limiting of existing contracts with private firms and the unremitting search for modes through which an evolving work-based penology could be inserted.

Since labor played such a large role in the Indiana’s plan to rehabilitate criminals, new rehabilitative techniques were adapted to the labor framework. The *Indianapolis Star* sent a psychology student from DePauw University, Allen Billingsly, to the Reformatory to inspect the institution’s new developments, most notably the psychology lab. Billingsly described the intense analysis and measurement that went into each

---

<sup>162</sup> “The Convict Labor Problem,” *Indianapolis Journal*, Feb. 13, 1899 (letter to the editor).

<sup>163</sup> James Reid to Governor Marshall, 191?, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Marshall), Box 86, Folder 3.

inmate. Part of this process was to assign the inmate to work that would “make capable laborers and artisans” out of them. The inmate’s work assignment was based on the desire to “fit the work to the man, not the man to the work.” Billingsly admired Indiana’s historically progressive penal system, writing that Indiana was the first state to accept rehabilitation as the primary purpose of prison, and her use of science in the prison once again placed Hoosiers in the vanguard of prison reform. To reformers and prison officials who actually carried out policy, work placement and skill building was a part of this science.<sup>164</sup> Indiana now had a system that combined modern techniques in the psychological science with views on rehabilitative labor.

Billingsly’s comments illustrate some important characteristics of Indiana’s penology in the early twentieth century. Contrary to the larger societal change in which a newly arrived industrial capitalist framework brought an unprecedented number of people to urban areas where they worked in manufactories that, in effect, took the skill out of labor, penal systems across the country adopted labor systems that put, or at least tried to put, skill back into work. And, unlike broader society that, in Billingsly’s terms, increasingly fit the man to the work, reformatories of the day attempted to “fit the work to the man.” Hoosiers, like the citizens of other transforming states in the early twentieth century, had a romantic vision of work and the effects of work on human beings. They looked to a past, less crime-ridden era dominated by small towns, small farms, and artisanal work.

At the same time, though, they tried to adapt the prison to modern times by supplying inmates a contemporary education, in terms of the latest machinery and

---

<sup>164</sup> Allen L. Billingsly, “Indiana Places Brain of Criminal under Microscope,” *Indianapolis Star*, April 20, 1913.

technical training, that would help them succeed in an increasingly specialized industrial world and place them above the flood of unskilled labor. Michigan City Warden D.J. Terhune, also a “captain of industry” of the day, told the *Indianapolis Star*, “We have reached a stage of advancement in this country where a man goes out to make a living at a trade finds himself seriously handicapped unless he has a technical education.”<sup>165</sup>

Indiana’s prison officials wanted more than just survival for these inmates. They wanted to produce workers with the artisanal values and morality of an older era and the technical skills of a new era. Hoosier penology featured a blend of both past and present.

Although the State Prison’s status as a maximum-security prison allowed less concentration on skill building than the Reformatory, the same philosophy concerning a positive and efficient place of work prevailed. According to Warden Fogarty, his management had produced a thriving industrial environment. Fogarty boasted about the 1,500 inmates at the State Prison who worked “night and day to get out rush orders.” By this time, convict-made products included stone work, twine, license plates, wicker furniture, blankets, cloth, “jap” mats, flour sifters, rat traps, fire screens, bird cages, bread toasters, horse muzzlers, fly traps, plug and smoking tobacco, and printed goods. Fogarty expected \$200,000 in twine business alone.<sup>166</sup>

With so many inmates working in such productive environments, the distribution of their goods gradually became a pressing issue. Now that many of the prisons’ shops operated on the state-account system, it was the responsibility of the state to move goods to its various institutions and sell the rest on the open market. In 1917, the General Assembly created the Prison Industries Act which streamlined Indiana’s prison industrial

---

<sup>165</sup> “Opposes Making of Roads by Convicts,” *Indianapolis Star*, August 30, 1910.

<sup>166</sup> “Indiana Prison Filters Morals,” *Indianapolis Star*, August 11, 1918.



network and crafted a Board of Classification of Industries whose duties included fixing prices, outlining which institutions would make what, and printing a catalogue to advertise Indiana's convict-made products. The Prison Industries Act represented a full-fledged prison economy with an unprecedented convict labor force and industrial output.<sup>167</sup>

As Indiana entered the second decade of the twentieth century, contract labor and the resulting goods grew more and more unpopular. Concurrently, however, penological theory attempted to adapt to this trend. Some prison officials pushed for a large farm on which to place less dangerous criminals where they could grow their own food and have as little effect as possible on free labor. The farm idea became more accepted, and although both the State Prison and Reformatory had sizable farms, the most complete and true forum for the agricultural experiment came about when, in 1914, the General Assembly ordered the building of a farm in Putnamville to house Indiana's misdemeanants. One of the leading proponents of the farm was Amos Butler, the secretary of the Indiana State Board of Charities and a nationally recognized prison reformer. Butler pushed the penal farm in a variety of reports, newspaper articles, and speeches around the country.

In 1917, Butler explained the advantages of the "industrial agricultural colony" in connection with the state's institutions. Prisons, he said, are to be schools of "industrial and physical training." He continued, "Most prisoners need to be taught to work," and "to be taught in the habits of industry...." He related the prison to a modern manufacturing enterprise that must be run with the "best business methods." Butler said,

---

<sup>167</sup> Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions, *Prison Industries* (1918), Indiana State Archives, Box OO #025086, "Reports From Committees on : Prison Labor 1917, Penal and Reformatory 1918 and 1928," Folder: Report of Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions 1918.

“I believe the farm colony the quickest, simplest, most effective and least expensive solution.”<sup>168</sup> Essentially, Butler wanted the progressive business model to be applied to prisons, one that was not only efficient, but also one that incorporated a moral and healthy environment for workers.

As Indiana’s third adult male penal institution, the Indiana State Farm, as it would be called, made sense to Hoosiers in regard to financial matters and free labor competition. But, as we will see in the next chapter, the language surrounding the Farm’s creation reveals an entirely different branch of reformers’ ever-developing penology. In any case, by the second decade of the twentieth century, Indiana had asserted itself as a state on the cutting edge of penal reform, and with that assertion, came new policy concerning convict labor. From the viewpoint of Indiana’s reformers and prison officials, inmates had gone from mindless cogs in a machine to a group of apprentices learning a skill that could benefit them in a modern industrial world. From the viewpoint of free labor representatives and many inmates themselves, the talk about trade schools and skill building was simply unsupported rhetoric. The free labor representatives thought the inmates were still overworked at jobs that had no real educational value, and most inmates cared very little about education in comparison to their desire to earn wages. Whether or not the experience of inmates changed substantially, a new but unsuccessful penology undoubtedly took hold in Indiana: Good skill-building work would lead to a morally superior skilled worker, and morally superior skilled workers would lead to less crime and fewer inmates.

---

<sup>168</sup> Amos Butler, “Colonies for Public Wards” in *The Proceedings of the State Conference of Charities and Correction* (Emporia, Kansas: 1917), 7-12.

The Reformatory and its programs lived on even after a crippling fire in 1918 and its move shortly after to Pendleton, Indiana. The State Prison at Michigan City, too, continued its mission. Both of these institutions had played a vital role in the development of Indiana's penal system, and they continued to develop as two players in the United States' complex and dramatic story of convict labor and prison reform. By 1915, however, Hoosiers' eyes focused at least temporarily on Indiana's new experiment, the Indiana State Farm.

### Chapter III

#### The Significance of the Frontier in Indiana Penology

At a testimonial dinner dedicated to prison reformer Amos Butler in 1922, the former president of the Indiana State Conference of Charities and Correction, Alexander Johnson, described a conversation he had with the literary editor of the *New York Evening Post* in which they discussed not only “the remarkable literary development in Indiana of recent years,” but also “the development, just as marked in the state, in art, in science, in manufacturing and commerce, and most of all, in social affairs, such as the care of defectives and dependents, the treatment of delinquents and all such matters.”<sup>169</sup> He continued,

Then I told the gentlemen that Indiana was the last of the frontier states; that those to the west of us, with some partial and minor exceptions, were settled along the lines of the railways; our ancestors came on horseback or on foot into the wilderness; they hewed their farms out of the forest or drained them out of the swamp. Only sturdy individualism could endure the hardships of the pioneering days.<sup>170</sup>

Whether or not Indiana’s creative energies actually resulted from the state’s pioneer past cannot be verified. Even the type of past Johnson portrays, calling Indiana “the last of the frontier states,” is questionable. But the real past of the Hoosier state and the real reason for Indiana’s creativity are irrelevant.

Justly or not, Hoosiers of the early twentieth century reminisced about a pioneer past that, in their minds, not only served to stimulate long-term advancement, but was also good and noble in itself, in terms of the values it incorporated. Interestingly enough,

---

<sup>169</sup> “Testimonial to Amos W. Butler,” in *At a Dinner in the Riley Room of the Claypool Hotel, Indianapolis* (1922), 22. Alexander Johnson had also served as the president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1897.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

this reminiscence manifested itself in Indiana's institutions, most notably the Indiana State Farm, the state's third adult male penal facility.

The Indiana State Farm and the rhetoric surrounding its creation in 1915 reflected many of the prevailing views of the early twentieth century concerning land, nature, and the pioneer ideal. What had happened to the days when a man could stake a claim and mold the untouched land with his own two hands? What had happened to the simpler times when communities consisted of a group of small and independent farming families? The sense of loss that reigned, combined with a rising level of crime, led to a unique penal philosophy that was eventually translated into a state penal farm.

While the inmates who came to the farm were subject to society's broader yearnings and the resulting penal system, they also transformed into active and powerful agents in the environmental history of the Indiana State Farm. The last portion of this chapter will delve deeper into the relationship between the inmates and the land they worked. This portion is not so much a complete environmental history, per se, but more of a historical perspective from which future environmental-historical work can gain new angles in the treatment of institutions such as prisons.

Although numerous works have been written on the history of prisons in the United States as well as the intellectual trends that produced the various prison reform movements, very few have dealt directly with the subject of the penal farm in northern states.<sup>171</sup> Most historians are drawn to more prominent penitentiaries or reformatories, usually in the Northeast (Cherry Hill, Auburn, Elmira, or Sing Sing). The rehabilitative penal farm is usually passed by as an example of a broader reform movement in the late

---

<sup>171</sup> For a list and description of work consulted for this study, see footnote 1 of chapter I.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when several states built new prisons called reformatories and applied such concepts as parole and indeterminate sentences. With a penal farm, such as the one started in Massachusetts in 1889, a state could centrally locate its minor offenders, mostly inebriates, while attempting to find a balance between a cost-effective penal system based on inmate labor and a reformatory penology. Penal farms were also thought to compete less with free labor, a characteristic that became more and more important as time progressed. This framework, for the most part, works in the case of Indiana's penal farm as well, but there is certainly more to it.

Indiana's penal farm provides an interesting example of how popular views about the environment can affect society, and in turn, a penal system. The works of Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx aid in exposing this relationship. In *Virgin Land*, Smith illustrates the impact of the old West, the Mississippi Valley, on America. When settlers built communities in this region, they plowed and cultivated the "virgin land," creating a virtual American garden. According to Smith, the image of this garden was ingrained into the American mind, and even after the region industrialized, the agricultural-based society and the garden remained the ideal. Americans associated farming and working the land with notions of "fecundity" and "growth."<sup>172</sup> Smith traces this "myth of the garden" up through the times of Frederick Jackson Turner and his frontier thesis (1893). Smith argues that Turner was simply a product of the same broad trend that formed the myth of the garden in the first place.<sup>173</sup> Smith also highlights Turner's idea that free and undeveloped land was vital to the American democratic experiment. Supposedly, when Americans pushed the boundaries of the frontier and confronted the wilderness, a sort of

---

<sup>172</sup> Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 138-39.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

rejuvenation within society took place.<sup>174</sup> This idea of rejuvenation is important in understanding the conception of the Indiana State Farm.

Leo Marx expands upon the Smith's study with his *Machine in the Garden*.<sup>175</sup> He argues that America, once viewed as a land of wilderness by colonizing Europeans, developed into a controlled garden. As the young country grew, its citizens maintained a "pastoral ideal," but when the machine entered the garden, a troubling contradiction ensued. Although Americans were forced to accept the machine as a symbol of progress, it made the agrarian antithesis that much more significant. The pastoral ideal and the machine-garden paradox also prove helpful in recognizing the significance of the Indiana State Farm.

Law-abiding citizens are not the only humans to whom social-historical and environmental-historical concepts can be applied in creating their history. Contemporary views about the environment, such as those included within the "pastoral ideal," can pertain to penal institutions just as much as any other cultural construction. Moreover, inmates, usually treated simply as pawns in history, can have a powerful effect on the environment. This history of the Indiana State Farm offers an opportunity to see how humans interact with nature and the environment via broad intellectual trends as well as through the inmates' physical contact with the land.

### **Butler's Exodus – The Emptying of Jails**

As Americans entered the twentieth century, they knew their country was going through an unprecedented era of change. In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>175</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

interpreted and popularized what the superintendent of 1890 census called the “closing” of the American frontier, a phrase referring the increased settlement in what was once known as the Great American Desert. The freshly populated and industrialized continent seemed much different than the agrarian paradise that many Americans envisioned. But quite possibly no other region was affected more by these changes than the old frontier, more specifically, the Midwest region that includes the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, these lands stood on the fringe between the undeveloped West and the urbanized East. What had been known as the Northwest Territory less than a century ago now entered a new stage in its development. According to census statistics, not only did this region welcome nearly six million new residents between 1900 and 1920, but for the first time over half its population lived in urban areas.<sup>176</sup>

Small autonomous communities were introduced to a newly structured and increasingly complex society—one based around industrial capitalism.<sup>177</sup> Small midwestern villages became towns, and towns became small cities all while becoming more and more dependent on each other. Indiana, the state on which this study focuses, was representative of the morphing region. By 1920, Indiana had 16,771 fewer individual farms than it had in 1900—a discouraging statistic for those who held to the ideal of the small independent farmer. Furthermore, partly due to World War I, self-employment became much less common as the number of people engaged in manufacturing industries rose over 70 percent from 1904 to 1919. Indiana and its cities

---

<sup>176</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. *1990 Census of Population and Housing*, “1990 Population and Housing Unit Counts: United States”, (CPH-2); and 1980 PC80-1-1. <http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urpop0090.txt>.

<sup>177</sup> For a classic discussion on the transformation of turn-of-the-century society and the self-sufficient community, see Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search For Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).



and towns grew significantly. Between 1890 and 1910, the population of Indiana's largest city and capital, Indianapolis, skyrocketed from 105,436 to 233,650.<sup>178</sup> As Indiana grew economically and demographically, it was only a matter of time before crime and the overcrowding of prisons and jails became an issue.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, most Hoosiers and penal authorities knew that Indiana's jail system was less than satisfactory. Amos Butler, the secretary for the Board of State Charities, created a report in 1913 on Indiana's jails. He explained that the jails used in Indiana and the rest of the country were essentially in the same condition as those in England almost three centuries earlier, a time when the eighteenth-century penologist John Howard pushed for extensive prison reform.<sup>179</sup>

Butler continued,

The condition of our jails may be stated in a few words, but I know of no words that are strong enough to convey to you an adequate idea of the terrible facts concerning some of them.<sup>180</sup>

Butler went on to describe Indiana's jails as "old, dark, damp, dirty, unsanitary and immoral." He referred to offensive pictures and language on the walls and unacceptable behavior of inmates, like gambling and the telling of stories about their crimes. To Butler and his colleagues, such an idle and unhealthy environment, where young misdemeanants were lodged next to more serious criminals, only bred more criminal activity.

In another report on Indiana's jails, Butler and some associates condemned the "viciousness and idleness" that characterized the counties' treatment of criminals. We

---

<sup>178</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990." *Population Division Working Paper No. 27*. June 1998. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027.html>.

<sup>179</sup> Amos W. Butler, *Our Jails* (Indiana Board of State Charities, 1913), 1-3.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 (Emphasis in original).

shudder at the atrocities of the Congo region, Butler wrote, “[we] but know nothing of the degradation of some of our local prisons.” According to him, jails were meant to serve only as holding cells for prisoners until they were convicted and sent to one of the state’s more appropriate institutions. However, the jails had become long-term homes where a plethora of prisoners including “the insane, the feeble-minded, and the epileptic” rotted in the “poorly planned, poorly kept, breeding places of disease and vice.” The report’s various authors recommended district workhouses or a penal farm and called for the creation of a commission in the General Assembly to investigate the problem. At the end of the report, the authors included an extract from Governor Thomas Marshall’s 1913 Address to the State Conference of Charities in which he outright supported the creation of a penal farm.<sup>181</sup>

Butler and company supported a solution for the state of Indiana that many had pushed for a few years. He recommended that the hundreds of state prisoners locked up in Indiana’s numerous county jails should be placed in a large agricultural prison with “varied topography and resources.” He emphasized the healthful environment that such a setting would provide and the improved physical and moral conditions that would follow.<sup>182</sup> Butler noted the high level of interest that such a prison provoked around the state and portrayed the proposed farm as truly pathbreaking. Although such a venture had already been taken up outside the country and on the federal level at Washington, D.C., only limited penal farms had been established on the state level in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> Amos Butler and Others. *Indiana's Jails* (1913), 1-7.

<sup>182</sup> Amos W. Butler, *Our Jails*, 2-3.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

The philosophy behind Butler's push for the farm was better expressed three years earlier in an address to the American Prison Association entitled "Convicts and Conservation." In effect, Butler describes how the conservation movement and the prison reform movement can cross paths. "Productive labor," Butler said, "is essential to the proper treatment of the prisoner." Jails did not provide this fundamental feature. On the conservation side, he condemned America's "proverbial" wastefulness. "We have been prodigal in our use of the things which Nature has so bountifully provided," he said. Because of Americans' unwise treatment of forests, water supplies, "beneficial birds," and farmland, the issue of conservation had moved to the fore. Inmates could be used to advance the conservation movement. Rather than performing demeaning chain-gang labor on roads or other public projects, the inmates could work on a farm and serve as a model community by working and reclaiming the land, mining stone, and maintaining forest reserves. "How great the results may be," Butler said, "in improving our land, increasing our crops, preserving or replacing our forests, or our benefits by good roads, we cannot comprehend."

Butler pointed to similar work being done already in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and even Michigan City, Indiana, where prisoners reclaimed some swampland. However, Butler envisioned a much larger movement in which Americans would make a conscious effort to translate conservationist ideology into penal policy. "The proper conservation of our natural resources and the proper employment of convicts are two great problems that must be solved by our people and they should be solved right," Butler concluded. "Why cannot these two problems be related?"<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> Amos Butler, "Convicts and Conversation," in *American Prison Association, President's Address* (Washington, D.C., 1910), 10-13.

In addition to his membership and prestigious positions in prison-related organizations like the National Conference of Charities and Correction, the American Prison Association, and the International Prison Congress (president, president, and vice president respectively), Butler took interest in numerous other societies and associations. An evaluation of these other facets of Butler's life can offer insight into the background of his prison reform philosophy. Butler was founder and president of the Indiana Academy of Science and the Indiana Audubon Society. He was the founder of the Brookville Society of Natural History, the founder of the Indiana Society for Mental Hygiene, and the first vice president and later president of the Society of Indiana Pioneers. As a bird-watcher, scientist, and "nature-loving prophet" as an admirer would later call him, Butler brought a unique perspective to the penological table.<sup>185</sup> His membership in the Society of Indiana Pioneers, however, is particularly interesting.

The Society of Indiana Pioneers was founded in 1916 (Indiana's centennial year) by a group of Indiana natives, including the wife of an Indianapolis newspaper publisher and a Butler University English professor, who desired to preserve and advance Indiana history and "to honor the memory and the work of the pioneers who opened Indiana to civilization."<sup>186</sup> Butler, as a member and high-ranking officer in the organization, took the group's cause to heart. Although Butler may have never commented extensively on Indiana history and its effect on his life and penological views, his actions and language are enough to recognize an influence. Between 1910 and 1920, Butler advanced a prison reform agenda that emphasized the supposed positive effects of nature, conservation,

---

<sup>185</sup> "Testimonial to Amos W. Butler," in *At a Dinner in the Riley Room of the Claypool Hotel, Indianapolis* (1922), 12-20.

<sup>186</sup> Murray Holliday, *A History of the Society of Indiana Pioneers, 1916-2005* (Indianapolis: Society of Indiana Pioneers, 2005), 1-10.

productive outside work, and community building. All of these features could easily be attributed to a pioneer ideal.

As for the penal farm, Butler was correct in his statement about his fellow Hoosiers' interest in such a venture. On March 13, 1913, Indiana's General Assembly passed a bill providing for a new penal farm, and Governor Samuel Ralston appointed four men to a penal commission to choose a site for the institution. The state allotted the commission \$60,000 to purchase the land needed.

In a report to the governor the following year, the Penal Farm Commission commented on the state's guidelines for the penal farm and the commission itself. Their task, the commissioners explained, was to create an institution that would be a "beehive of well-regulated and varied industry" and not only "healthful," "uplifting," and "in the open-air," but also self-sufficient.<sup>187</sup> An institution like this seemed to hold much profit potential, but more importantly, the commission was creating a basic blueprint for the perfect community, penal institution or not. The success of this operation, however, hinged more so on the inmates' relationship to their environment and the land they worked, not necessarily the farm creators' actions.

The commission members considered many factors when choosing the site for the new penal farm. The cost of land topped the priority list, expectedly, but much of the talk concerning potential sites revolved around beauty and abundance. In April 1914, the *Indianapolis News* justified the probable site at Putnamville, Indiana, describing it as "a part of Hoosierdom that is famous for natural beauty" and "crowded with hills of

---

<sup>187</sup> "Putnam County Gets Penal Farm," *Indianapolis Star*, April 29, 1914.

limestone and valleys that are rich in fertility.”<sup>188</sup> The animals used to prepare the farm and provide meat for the inmates could graze the “several high, rolling fields.”<sup>189</sup> In the past, Hoosiers had expected Putnamville, a small village founded in 1831, to grow into a sort of “great stone center,” but the industry never developed, and now they looked to the inmates to take advantage of the town’s underground asset. The inmates could also clear the timber on the land and use it to construct the various buildings and structures on the farm.<sup>190</sup> The language used in this newspaper coverage of the farm fostered a sense of settlement. The penal commission and other interested Hoosiers seemed to take on the persona of a pioneer, scoping out a potential tract of land to stake a claim and build a community.

Later that month, the commission finally made its decision to purchase a 1,567-acre tract of land near Putnamville for \$57,000. The *Indianapolis News* reported that Putnamville had beaten out nineteen other sites by scoring high on a 100-point test assessing the site’s potential accommodation for raw materials, farmland, and industry.<sup>191</sup> The Putnamville site had it all. Immersed in a multi-pronged, self-sufficient community, the inmates could interact with the environment on a number of different levels. Living and working in an outside setting would improve the health of the inmates, but the process of maintaining the community would rehabilitate the entire man, mind and body. In this multidimensional process, inmates would thoroughly manipulate the land with their labor, first preparing it for settlement, then tending and mining the fruits of the land

---

<sup>188</sup> “Site that Probably will be Chosen for Penal Farm is in Limestone Hills Near Putnamville,” *Indianapolis News*, April 16, 1914.

<sup>189</sup> “Indiana Outdoor Prison...,” *Indianapolis Star*, Jan. 10, 1915.

<sup>190</sup> “Site that Probably will be Chosen for Penal Farm is in Limestone Hills Near Putnamville,” *Indianapolis News*, April 16, 1914.

<sup>191</sup> “Penal Farm Site is Chosen by Commission,” *Indianapolis News*, April 29, 1914.

(crops, orchards, limestone, shale, etc.), and lastly, using the product of their labor to feed themselves and to manufacture a plethora of goods in such forms as building material or furniture. Such an active and productive environment differed greatly from the jails Amos Butler described.

In December 1914, the state transported the first twenty-four inmates from the Michigan City and Jeffersonville prisons to the new state farm site to erect the very buildings that they and their fellow prisoners would be utilizing. The *Indianapolis News* reported on the inmates' ostensible eagerness to work. Some of the inmates supposedly inquired of Charles Talkington, the farm's first superintendent, if they could be honored with the position of boss carpenter.<sup>192</sup>

### **Reclaiming Land, Reclaiming Men**

In the first annual report of the Indiana State Farm, the board of trustees, excited about their new institution, reaffirmed the philosophy behind the facility. The prisoners, the board explained, were placed

instead of in jails, on a state-owned farm, where, in surroundings totally different from those whence they came, out in the open and in the sunshine, close to nature, they, at the lowest and least hopeful aspect of the case, could be given a better opportunity than they had hitherto had of getting out of the downward-running rut in which they had been traveling from bad to worse.<sup>193</sup>

The board continued,

...for the men the Indiana State Farm is intended to provide a complete change; for noisome alleys, a beautiful country home; for uncertain and unwholesome food in dirty quarters, regular meals in a commodious

---

<sup>192</sup> "Penal Farm Prisoners Seem Anxious to Work," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 3, 1914.

<sup>193</sup> *First Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1915), 5.

dining room with an abundance of good food well cooked. It is good food, for they raise most of it themselves on the farm.<sup>194</sup>

What was it about nature and the open country that made a penal farm so attractive to Hoosiers? A farm was certainly better than an unventilated jail cell, but did they assume that a little fresh air and some good old-fashioned farm work would make these men into reformed, law-abiding individuals? Did they think that the land held a special rejuvenating power, or was this just a cover-up for the state's desire for a profitable penal system? In any case, the building of the farm was well underway, and Hoosiers had their fingers crossed as their experiment progressed.

The board of trustees made a special note to thank the superintendents at Michigan City and Jeffersonville for the use of those prisoners who were sent to prepare the farm. They praised the "good" and "skilled" men who had put their heart and soul into developing the farm. The inmates, the board wrote, showed the "interest and eagerness of pioneer settlers in preparing their own home farms."<sup>195</sup> The *Indianapolis News* described these pioneers as "industrious" and reported a story of a man so eager to get started on a garden that he walked to the superintendent's office to get his garden seed. The enthusiasm of these inmates seemed to substantiate the pastoral ideal of the farm's creators.

The inmates initially stayed in tents borrowed from the Indiana National Guard, but eventually the prisoners used the resources on the site to build some of the first buildings, including their homes.<sup>196</sup> When not working, the inmates had an extraordinary amount of freedom. Without supervision, they explored the farm, hunted, and told stories

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>196</sup> Amos W. Butler, "Farm Colonies vs. County Jails," *Indianapolis Daily Times*, May 19, 1915.



around a campfire.<sup>197</sup> Although these inmates were only minor offenders, the amount of independence and trust given to them demonstrates the farm administrators' faith in their system. To the trustees, superintendent, and their fellow Hoosiers, it appeared as though the farm was on the right track and well on its way to becoming the man-reforming and self-sufficient community that the farm commission originally designed.

On April 12, 1915, the farm, now able to accommodate 200 inmates, received its first major wave of misdemeanants from Indianapolis and Bloomington.<sup>198</sup> Amos W. Butler created another report in 1915, this time published in the *Indianapolis Daily Times*. Butler told his readers that the inmates were at work on various projects around the farm including the building of dormitories, a kitchen, and a dining room. Indiana was a leader in the field of penology, he wrote, and it was only a matter of time before more "industrial farm colonies" like the one built at Putnamville would pop up across the country for offenders of all classes.<sup>199</sup>

The first few years were a critical period for the farm. A sense of experimentation surrounded the inmates and the administrators as they built their community from the ground up. These "pioneer settlers" had set out to build a thriving, profitable community that, if founded by normal civilian settlers, would have taken decades to develop. At times, it seemed as though those who reported on the farm disregarded the fact that they were dealing with inmates. Superintendent Talkington announced that he needed more men at the farm to get the desired work done.<sup>200</sup> Every year, the board of trustees and the superintendent commented on the new improvements on the farm. By September of

---

<sup>197</sup> "Penal Farm is Ready to Receive Prisoners," *Indianapolis News*, April 12, 1915.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Butler, "Farm Colonies vs. County Jails," *Indianapolis Daily Times*, May 19, 1915.

<sup>200</sup> "Able-Bodied Men are Needed at Penal Farm," *Indianapolis News*, Jan. 11, 1916.

1916, the inmates had built several buildings including a group of dormitories (which would later develop around a “main street”), a recreation center, laundry facility, administration building, and a power plant that provided electric power for light, heat, and a water pump.<sup>201</sup> They also constructed three miles of railroad and fourteen miles of fence to enclose their livestock.<sup>202</sup> By 1917, the farm’s inmates had nearly raised a fully functional community. Onlookers now waited to see if a self-sufficient community could rehabilitate a man.

The reports from the board of trustees and superintendent of the state farm exhibit their views concerning the relationship between man, nature, and work. The board wrote in 1917 that as Indiana’s population grew, an increasing mass was “steadily deteriorating in virility and manhood.” Being self-supporting on the farm was presumably connected directly to self-respect and self-sufficiency outside of the institution. Furthermore, each inmate had plenty of space at the farm, and no two would ever need to touch. According to the board, either air and sunlight or cool darkness could rehabilitate a man or at least “retard decay.” They continued:

A farm with its varied outdoor occupations...and all the multifarious industries of an industrial community, intended to be self-supporting, is the best possible. In handling stock and helping to raise his own subsistence, he does not get any worse, that is certain.

The board went so far as to invite the judges and prosecutors of Indiana to visit and spend a few days at the farm where they would be “received and entertained as

---

<sup>201</sup> It is unclear when the term “main street” first was used. Of the newspapers explored for this study, the first appearance was not until 1948. However, the importance is the main street *feeling*, not the actual term.

<sup>202</sup> *Second Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1916), 4.

guests.”<sup>203</sup> These guests could come to the inmates’ pleasant little town and observe first hand the rehabilitative process.

Some of the most enlightening comments of these administrators deal with land reclamation. Although many of the early descriptions of the Putnamville site noted the fertility of its land, the inmates soon found a challenge. Much of the farm’s acreage proved less than suitable for growing crops. According to the board, this worthless and undesirable land would be worked by the worthless and undesirable men, and by doing so both parties, the land and men, would be restored and reclaimed. These inmates were going to mold this gully-filled land into a profitable farm. By altering the land and protecting it against erosion, floods, and droughts, the state farm would stand as an example to all other Indiana farmers and “ultimately point the way to the solution of the large problem of conservation.” The board also had plans for a forest reserve in which good timber would be raised in a progressive fashion.<sup>204</sup>

In a later report, board members expanded upon these views. According to them, the land at the Putnamville site was some of the worst and least fertile land in the state, and a penal farm had something to offer that the normal farmer did not—time. The private farmer could not put in the time and labor necessary to restore such a spread of land. The board wrote, “As this work may take years, private individuals cannot undertake it but the State can wait for long deferred harvests and it can stretch out a hand through time to catch the far off interest of toil, for its years are the eternal years of

---

<sup>203</sup> *Third Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1917), 5-7.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

God.”<sup>205</sup> Essentially, the farm was a large-scale science experiment, putting new farming methods and new fertilizers to the test.

At times, the board was especially blunt when speaking of the inmates. “Why not put the waste material to reclaiming the waste land?” they asked. “Extermination” or “deportation” were not options for the state of Indiana, and having the inmates work this land seemed doubly effective considering the land and the inmates could repair each other at the same time. Furthermore, as far as the board was concerned, the worse the land the better. Anybody could cultivate an already fertile piece of land with rich soil, they said. The best and most rewarding land for a man was the poor land that no one wanted and was thought to be useless. This type of land could “stimulate energy” in a human being. With the tone a revolutionary manifesto, the board wrote:

Treat it [the land] as the men are treated—feed and fatten both, treat them considerately but firmly and both will respond with a harvest mayhap of wheat or some other grain and with sturdy manhood.<sup>206</sup>

As the inmate tended his crops, essentially, the earth would release an “energy” inside him, making him a better and more “sturdy” man. What was this “energy” of which the board spoke? Could the relationship between man and the land be so strong as to completely rehabilitate an inmate and transform him from a criminal or vagabond into a productive and self-reliant member of American society? The administrators and their fellow Hoosiers had high hopes for the farm and what it could offer their growing state. Indiana was ushering in a new era of penal reform, and many were watching.

As the face of Indiana prison reform, Butler gave talks all over the country. In 1917, Butler explained to an audience in Kansas the value of farm “colonies” to state

---

<sup>205</sup> *Fifth Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm*. (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1919), 8.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

institutions. Before the penal farm, he wrote, misdemeanants lived “in idleness at the expense of the taxpayer” and became “degenerate both physically and morally.” Showing his conservationist tendencies, Butler said that instead of inmates wasting away in jail, they could be put to work on the good clay land that had also sat idly to build a “remarkably beautiful and productive estate.”<sup>207</sup> The farm filled the proper role of a prison as a “hospital” of “industrial and physical training.” Inmates could be taught the “basics of industry” while participating in a “great manufacturing plant.”<sup>208</sup> The law creating the farm included a provision that skilled inmates would be transferred from the Reformatory and State Prison to help build the new facility as foremen. “From every point of view,” he wrote, “the industrial agricultural colony is one of the most helpful developments of the times in public charities and correction.”<sup>209</sup> The farm was built with very little money. The inmates and officers used their ingenuity to raise a workable “colony.” They connected an old sawmill to a local spring to provide the most essential resource, water. They cut and sawed timber on site for building material. From nearby quarries, they mined stone that would become foundations for their community’s buildings and material for fence posts. The farm’s workers created a locomotive engine out of an old traction engine to maneuver cars around on the track.<sup>210</sup>

Again and again, the administration stressed the self-reliance and self-respect that the farm promoted. The beggars and thieves who were supposedly “burdens and nuisances” to their communities came to the farm where the state offered them a

---

<sup>207</sup> Amos Butler, “Colonies For Public Wards “ in *The Proceedings of the State Conference of Charities and Correction* (Emporia, Kansas, 1917), 9.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

wholesome environment with good clothing and good shelter.<sup>211</sup> The prisoners' wardrobe at the farm did not consist of the striped and degrading uniforms still at least partly used in institutions around the country, and in this "prison without walls," the inmates had extra sense of freedom.<sup>212</sup> During his stay, an inmate would accept the farm as his home while participating in the ultimate self-help program. Self-help, after all, was the best kind of help.

Much hope surrounded the farm in its early years. Short anecdotes of success periodically appeared in the newspapers. For example, one inmate, who happened to be an expert mechanic, accepted a job offer from the farm after he served his time. His former employer supposedly offered him much more money, but the quality of life at the farm was enough to convince him to turn down his old city job.<sup>213</sup> His story was not uncommon. By 1918, many of the foremen at the farm were former inmates who had voluntarily lingered.<sup>214</sup> Such a trend only reinforced the confidence in the state farm idea and the fulfilling work it offered.

The good news continued. Superintendent Talkington told the *Indianapolis News* that 90 percent of the inmates gained an average of ten pounds due to the wholesome food at the farm.<sup>215</sup> He also reported that the men took pride in their work. Even a "small gang of negroes" who were working on some fencing needed no supervision.<sup>216</sup> When Governor Ralston made his first visit to the farm in 1916, he was quite impressed

---

<sup>211</sup> *Fourth Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1918), 5.

<sup>212</sup> The "uniforms" at the state farm were simply plain shirts and trousers. The color of the suit is not known.

<sup>213</sup> J.P. Edmison, "Men Get Chance on Penal Farm," *Greencastle Herald-Democrat*, July 4, 1915.

<sup>214</sup> "Farm Work for State Charges is Favored," *Indianapolis News*, May 7, 1918.

<sup>215</sup> "Penal Farm Methods Cause Crime Decrease," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 20, 1920.

<sup>216</sup> "Able-Bodied Men are Needed at Penal Farm," *Indianapolis News*, Jan. 11, 1916.

at the progress of the inmates and management.<sup>217</sup> Two years later, the new governor, James Goodrich, also had promising words for the farm. The *Indianapolis News* reported on Goodrich's farming background and his desire for all penal institutions to have a healthful agricultural program like that of the state farm.<sup>218</sup>

Hoosiers were not the only ones taking interest in the farm. John Whitman, Illinois's superintendent of prisons, wrote a letter to Amos Butler in which he commented on his 1918 visit to Indiana's institutions. "I was very much interested in everything I saw there," Whitman wrote, "especially on the state farm." He congratulated Butler on the farm's success and "good returns." Impressed by the manner in which inmates built up the farm and supported themselves, Whitman concluded that the state farm system was the "ideal thing to do." Such a system, he said, would prove helpful in solving the current "industrial problem," and he recommended that the new Indiana Reformatory (at Pendleton) be built and managed similarly.<sup>219</sup>

The State Farm also did its part to aid the allied powers in World War I in Europe. In 1918, the county chairman of Putnam County received a letter from the chairman of the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, asking for the "proper distribution of the paroled and released prisoners" to various farms in the county in the hopes of alleviating the labor shortage in American agriculture. The chairman wrote, "The necessity for making every person an efficient unit in our war for democracy, makes it necessary for each one of us to forget social prejudices whenever they interfere

---

<sup>217</sup> "Ralston Visits at Penal Farm," *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 10, 1916.

<sup>218</sup> "Farm Work for State Charges is Favored," *Indianapolis News*, May 7, 1918.

<sup>219</sup> John Whitman to Amos Butler, Oct. 18, 1918. Indiana State Archives, Box 00 #025086, "Reports From Committees on: Prison Labor 1917, Penal and Reformatory 1918 and 1928," Folder: Report of State Committee on Prison Labor 1917, #3.

with the accomplishment of war work.”<sup>220</sup> In the chairman’s eyes, prisoners were not simply prisoners; they were a wasted labor market to tap. In Warden Talkington’s letter to the War Industries Board, he included a list of men eligible for discharge organized by their vocations. He warned, however, that since most of the men were misdemeanants and came from the city, very few of them had sufficient knowledge of farm work.<sup>221</sup>

The first five years proved overwhelmingly successful ones for the farm. Problems, for the most part, appeared few and far between. At one point, some neighbors complained about escapes from the farm and the decline of their property value, and in another instance, a local coal miners union accused state farm inmates of replacing free laborers of the Ingle Coal Company and the Globe Mining Company.<sup>222</sup> On the whole, however, the farm’s annual reports and the newspaper coverage of the farm’s activities continued to shower Indiana’s newest penal institution with praise.<sup>223</sup> The farm seemed to be everything its creators predicted. The men took pride in their work, and as far as the public knew, more men every year became rehabilitated and “sturdy.” The public’s support, after all, had always been vital in the acceptance of prison reform throughout history. According to the 1918 report of the Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions, officials involved in the early stages of the farm estimated that only four hundred inmates would stay there at any one time. However, they continued, “the

---

<sup>220</sup> E. Stag Whitin to County Chairman of Putnam County, 1918, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Goodrich), Box 155, State Farm Folder.

<sup>221</sup> Charles Talkington to Hugh Frayne, July 11, 1918. Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Goodrich), Box 155, State Farm Folder.

<sup>222</sup> Charles Talkington to Governor Goodrich, Sept. 16, 1918, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Goodrich), Box 155, State Farm Folder. Talkington explained to Ingle of the Ingle Coal Company that the inmates were doing only surface work, not the underground work of the miners. Ingle assured Talkington that no more trouble would ensue.

<sup>223</sup> “State Penal Farm is Not Making a Great Hit with Some of Its Putnam County Neighbors,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 27, 1915.



favorable publicity given it and the cordial support of judges, prosecuting attorneys, sheriffs, and other officials made it a very popular place for all but the prisoners.”<sup>224</sup> Prison officials evidently grew fonder of the farm idea. Among a set of conclusive points in a 1917 report, the Committee on Prison Labor favored an “increase in farm facilities” among Indiana’s institutions. They claimed that the “trade school arrangement” was temporary (although there is little evidence of this at the trade schools’ creation), and farms were the way of the future.<sup>225</sup>

It was not long, however, until Indiana’s penal farm ran into its first major obstacles. In 1920, a former inmate, Charles McNulty, charged that prisoners at the farm were poorly fed and generally mistreated. Governor Goodrich quickly created a committee to investigate the charges, and the Board of State Charities also inspected the farm independently.<sup>226</sup> Superintendent Talkington disregarded the accusations as nonsense. The inmates, he argued, received all the comforts of the average family in Indiana.<sup>227</sup> It only took a few weeks for Goodrich’s committee to compile a report finding the farm innocent of the charges. According to the committee, their interviews with inmates and employees showed that the inmates were definitely well fed and not overworked.<sup>228</sup> They also concluded that the facilities were sanitary, sodomy was kept to a minimum, and the officers and guards of the farm were “neither cruel or insulting.” “We find most of the complaints made in the McNulty letter,” the committee wrote,

---

<sup>224</sup> Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions, *Report to the Board of State Charities*, Nov. 8th, 1918, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Goodrich), Box 155, State Farm Folder.

<sup>225</sup> *Conclusions from the Forthcoming Report of the Committee on Prison Labor Appointed by the Governor, Approved by Boards of Trustees and Indiana Board of Sate Charities*, Jan. 2, 1917, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Goodrich), Box 155, State Farm Folder.

<sup>226</sup> “Probe of State Farm Charges is Underway,” *Indianapolis News*, April 27, 1920.

<sup>227</sup> *Sixth Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1920), 3-10.

<sup>228</sup> “Farm Well Managed, Governor is Informed,” *Indianapolis News* May 17, 1920.

“were based upon hear-say, and not upon his own knowledge.”<sup>229</sup> The farm passed its first real test with ease.

By the late 1920s, though, those involved with the farm knew their experiment was by no means perfect. Superintendent Ralph Howard’s report to the board of trustees clearly contained a tinge of pessimism. “The percentage of repeaters remains about as usual—from 18-20%,” Howard wrote, “and we really see very little of our efforts from a standpoint of reclamation.”<sup>230</sup> The days of romantic rhetoric about reclaiming men while reclaiming land were dwindling. The penal farm showed Hoosiers the limitation of their pastoral and community ideals.

The farm continued to grow regardless. In 1927, the board of trustees provided an inventory of sorts to the governor. The farm had six dormitories, a recreation building, administration building, industrial building, dining room, kitchen, bakery, a hospital, a canning factory, furniture factory, machine shop, brick plant, stone crushing plant, a greenhouse, and eleven employee cottages. Its range of profitable industries, including agriculture, collectively employed over 80 percent of a population exceeding 1,000 inmates.<sup>231</sup> Despite its inability to employ all of its inmates, the farm stood as quite an accomplishment in Indiana’s penal system, and every year the farm dumped a large surplus into the state’s general fund. The only real asset the farm seemed to have, though, was its productivity.

The results of a study on the farm, completed in 1929, again illustrated the shortcomings of the farm creators’ ideology. It was no revelation that intoxication led

---

<sup>229</sup> Indiana Board of State Charities. *Investigation into Complaints of Charles McNulty*: Indiana State Farm, 1920, Indiana State Archives, Governors' Papers (Goodrich), Box 155, State Farm Folder.

<sup>230</sup> *Twelfth Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1926), 5.

<sup>231</sup> *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1927), 4-10.

many inmates to the farm, but the study found that not only were most of the prisoners at the farm over thirty years old and not included in the “flaming youth” considered dangerous by many Indiana residents, but a large portion of these men were from farming communities. Harold Feightner of the *Indianapolis News* wrote, “Peculiarly enough, some of the recognized agricultural counties had greater numbers of men there than some of the industrial counties.”<sup>232</sup> The state founded the farm on the idea that a rural self-sufficient community could change a man, but city-life, oddly, was not necessarily the cause of crime.

Two months later, Horace Coats of the *Indianapolis Star* reported that about 35 percent of inmates at the farm had been there previously. Such a high rate of recidivism invalidated the idea that farm would be a center for human rejuvenation. However, the farm management, Coats wrote, could not be blamed for this fact. Coats attributed the disturbing statistic to the lack of check-ups on former inmates, the lack of discharge fees, and the former inmates’ willingness to spend time on the farm rather than “dig for their coffee and cakes outside.” The passing of the Hawes-Cooper act, Coates continued, could complicate the farm’s problems even more. The law, which banned the interstate shipment of prison-made goods, could potentially hurt the farm’s industries, most notably its wicker basket factory, the largest of its kind in the world.<sup>233</sup>

The farm’s troubles persisted. In 1933, the *Indianapolis Daily Times* ran a series of investigative stories about a “brutality reign” at the farm. Arch Steinel began the first installment of the series with these words:

---

<sup>232</sup> Harold Feightner, “Most State Farm Inhabitants Have Passed 30-Year-Old Mark,” *Indianapolis News*, March 28, 1930.

<sup>233</sup> Horace Coats, “Indiana State Farm Reaches Overflow Point After Fifteen Years’ Operation,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 25, 1930.

Men...beaten with clubs, bruised with blackjacks, some with legs chained striding in half-steps, stumbling over rocks, falling exhausted and perspiration-soaked on cots, with riveted chains clanking in their troubled sleep.

Men...handcuffed to cell doors for hours, waiting for a morsel of bread and a cup of water to be doled out for meals. Sick men forced to the grind of the quarry and laughed at or cursed when they protested their sickness. The cry of a guard, "You dirty \_\_\_\_\_, you're stalling."

The *Daily Times* investigators based their articles on numerous affidavits from former inmates. Steinel described the inmates at the farm as victims of economic depression, not serious criminals, and undeserving of the cruel punishment at a supposedly correctional institution. The articles contained various stories of torture in which guards would use "almost as much force of fist, caning, and starvation as in the notorious prison camps of Georgia." According to Steinel, ill inmates were taunted, beaten, and given only bread and water. Supposedly uncooperative inmates were placed in "the hole" where they were starved and blackjacked. What once were regular inmate work crews were now chain gangs. The inmates resorted to stuffing cloth between their chains and legs to prevent sores from forming.<sup>234</sup> The farm, once based on healthy labor and a special connection between man and the environment, transformed into a camp based on fear and violence.

Governor Paul V. McNutt ordered investigations of the charges made against the state farm and replaced Superintendent Clifford Craig, who was ill and sent to the Indiana State Sanitarium, with former Superintendent Ralph Howard, who had left in 1931. McNutt expected Howard to institute the necessary changes concerning discipline at the farm. As the 1930s came to a close, the Indiana State Farm experienced some major changes indeed. The *Indianapolis Star* described the farm's transformation from a sobering spot for drunkards to a "modern social-minded prison." Superintendent Floyd J.

---

<sup>234</sup> Arch Steinel, "Brutality Reign is Exposed," *Indianapolis Daily Times*, July 7, 1933.

Hemmer, who took over in 1937, offered a “new deal” in prison treatment based not simply around work, but around education and the control of “social disease.”<sup>235</sup> Under Hemmer’s administration, the farm established a new surgery and a library of 4,000 books, recreational baseball, basketball, boxing, and horseshoe leagues, various educational and vocational training classes (including a criminology class, one of two in all American prisons), a more extensive moving picture collection, an inmate newspaper called the *Hill Top-ic*, and a more complete inmate classification program. Hemmer’s 1941 report provided considerable insight into the make-up of inmates at the farm. He noticed a new trend, observing that the number of boys under age twenty increased by 120 from just the previous year. Instead of the usual vagrancy and drunkenness that characterized older inmates, Hemmer wrote, neglected childhoods, poor families, and environmental backgrounds probably caused this new influx.<sup>236</sup> Hemmer’s language sounded like that of a new penology. The days when the rehabilitation of a man required only land, work, and fresh air seemed to be over.

World War II affected the farm in a couple of different ways. The war hindered the United States’ import of various agricultural products, and the farm administrators saw an opportunity to show their patriotism while making a profit. The board of trustees at the farm proposed an experiment in which the inmates could grow some of these imported products. The program would also provide an example for farmers in the future

---

<sup>235</sup> “Prison a Model at Putnamville,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 29, 1939.

<sup>236</sup> *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1941), 10-13.

who decide to pick up the new crops. The soybean, a crop primarily imported from Asia, and certain medical ingredients topped the list of crops falling into this category.<sup>237</sup>

The post-war farm was more productive than ever. In 1948, for the first time in its history, the farm's receipts exceeded one million dollars.<sup>238</sup> Reporter Wayne Guthrie of the *Indianapolis News* wrote in his column that he was impressed with the activity at the farm. The productivity at the farm was incredible to Guthrie. He visited the stone quarry, the brick and tile works, the furniture factory, the abattoir, and the canning plant.<sup>239</sup> The inmates at the farm were busy gathering brick for two new hospitals, and tons of "agricultural limestone" were transported daily across the state. Guthrie reported that the farm canned 276,000 gallons of vegetables last year, and in one week the farm slaughtered up to thirty-five cattle and seventy-five hogs. Guthrie also noted the 16,000 man hours contributed to a local tornado clean-up.<sup>240</sup> After three decades, the inmates interacted with the land and the fruits of that land more than ever.

Unfortunately, increased productivity did not necessarily affect the inmates in a positive way. Hoosiers became increasingly aware of the farm's limits by the late 1940s. In 1948, Louis Hiner, Jr. of the *Indianapolis News* summarized reports from a national penal survey group, the Osbourne Association, and Austin McCormick, a respected penologist. These reports illustrated that the farm treated its young offenders unsatisfactorily. Corporal punishment, and the use of the blackjack, was not uncommon

---

<sup>237</sup> Maurice Early, "The Day in Indiana," *Indianapolis Star*, April 18, 1942. The war also affected the population of the state farm. Between the bombing of Pearl Harbor (Dec. 7, 1941) and April of 1942, the farm population decreased by forty-five every month. Hemmer speculated that the men who would have made their way to the farm under normal conditions were now either drafted into the military or hired into an industrial job. A few years after the war, however, veterans would make up a quarter of the farm's population.

<sup>238</sup> *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1948), 1-3.

<sup>239</sup> An "abattoir" is a slaughterhouse.

<sup>240</sup> Wayne Guthrie, "Ringside in Hoosierland," *Indianapolis News*, May 4, 1948.

in the punishment of inmates as young as sixteen years old, and one story had a youngster of 105 pounds and with “atrophied” legs working in a labor-intensive shale pit.<sup>241</sup> This sort of brutality, thought to have subsided after the investigations over a decade earlier, certainly was not corrective.

Hiner wrote another article concerning the high rate of recidivism at the farm. He reported that over half of the inmates at the farm had been there previously. He mentioned one inmate, who was supposedly sentenced to the farm when it first opened, now serving his forty-ninth sentence. In another story, a soon-to-be released inmate borrowed a shirt from a fellow inmate and said, “I’ll bring it back here next week.” Ultimately, Hiner’s article blames the careless work of the two farm psychologists and the lack of individualized treatment for the inmates. In many cases, the classification board, which often met for only five minutes, simply placed the newly arrived inmate in an Alcoholics Anonymous program and assigned him to one of the six dormitories which held about two hundred inmates each.<sup>242</sup> In the past, it seemed as though many former inmates returned to the farm simply to work as non-inmate specialists, but now an increasing majority returned as inmates once again.

The “repeater” problem persisted in following years. Reporter Fremont Power described a situation in which Superintendent Albert Ellis and the classification board “greeted an old acquaintance.”

“Well hello, Chris!” the superintendent said.

“Now we got us a butcher,” another member of the classification board exclaimed.

---

<sup>241</sup> Louis Hiner Jr., “Youths Sent to State Farm Receive Doubtful Benefits,” *Indianapolis News*, Nov. 18, 1948.

<sup>242</sup> Louis Hiner Jr., “Steady Customers,” *Indianapolis News*, Nov. 24, 1948.

Nobody had to tell Chris what to do.<sup>243</sup>

The farm psychologist, Eugene Donham, estimated that 90 percent of the inmates at the farm were chronic alcoholics. To him, this was the reason behind the high rate of recidivism. Donham said that an alcohol therapy program would probably help the inmates, but “you just don’t have enough time to work with them.”<sup>244</sup> A cynical and pessimistic attitude plagued the farm.

The farm did not work, and its own officials knew it. The farm came into existence with powerful language about reclaiming land, reclaiming men, the benefits of nature, and freeing unfortunates from Indiana’s horrifying jails, but the farm seemed to have really no effect at all. With their pastoral and community ideals, early twentieth-century Hoosiers gave birth to a unique penal institution. Those ideals, it turned out, could not be applied successfully in a prison or forced labor setting, no matter how open the environment or fresh the air. It is difficult to say whether the ideals failed because they grew from nostalgia of a past that never existed or because such ideals were not appropriate for an incarcerated bunch. Nevertheless, the rhetoric surrounding the farm’s supposed reforming aspects subsided fairly quickly, and then the only thing it had going for itself was its level of productivity and output. The profit motive did indeed contribute to the institution’s preservation as a farm and industrial community, but the fact that a set of views about nature and land led to a penal institution that remained in essentially the same shape and style for almost seven decades testifies to the power of an intellectual trend.

---

<sup>243</sup> Fremont Power, “Liquor Offenders Swamp the Farm,” *Indianapolis News*, Jan. 26, 1950.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.



The Indiana State Farm still exists, but in the form of the Putnamville Correctional Facility. Although some of the same buildings from the farm's early years remain on the farm, the modern facility is much different. Overcrowding in Indiana's other penitentiaries finally forced Indiana to convert the state farm into a medium-security prison in 1983. Consequently, the state erected the farm's first major fences designed to keep in its inmates. Misdemeanants, as in the years before the farm's creation, once more became the responsibility of county jails. Throughout the next two decades, supervising the outside work of the farm's more serious offenders became more and more costly. The farm gradually abandoned its farming and industrial programs, and by 1998, only a few limited operations, like wicker furniture manufacturing and pallet rebuilding, were running. The state currently leases much of the prison's land to local farmers. The prison at Putnamville now stands as a very ordinary modern prison, bulging at the seams with nearly 2,500 inmates. A majority of the inmates do very little work, and the prison, now far from self-sufficient, imports all necessary food and supplies from private vendors.

### **Inmates as Historical Agents**

The farm may have been a product of the cultural and intellectual trends at the turn of the century, but the farm and its inmates also served as active historical agents. Their agency comes primarily in two different forms. First, the state farm was essentially a failed experiment and helped guide Indiana's penal system to where it is now. Whether it was due to a realization of the pastoral ideal's limits or a desire for a more cost-effective penitentiary, Indiana did not build any more penal farms, and the state ultimately chose to transform the farm itself into a traditional medium-security

penitentiary. Escapes from the originally fenceless prison and the high return rate of inmates showed the limit of early twentieth century penologists.<sup>245</sup> The supposedly life-changing institution could neither guarantee the loyalty of an inmate with its rewarding work nor rehabilitate a man into a self-reliant and law-abiding citizen. Moreover, the addition of fences and watchtowers and the abandonment of farming on the farm reinforce the label of “failure.”

The penal farm of Indiana, now the Putnamville Correctional Facility, stands as an example and also a stepping-stone in the United States penal system’s resort to mass incarceration. Torture did not work, dungeons did not work, the hard labor-based prisons did not work, the so-called reformatories did not work, the penal farms did not work, and now we are left with large scale “correctional” campuses with overcrowded dormitories and little productive work. These too, for all intents and purposes, do not work. Most would agree that the future of corrections does not look good. From 1915 onward, the Indiana State Farm carried the torch of failure, and the high hopes and large ideals that surrounded it disintegrated over the years. The farm now serves as a case study for those who think that perhaps the energies put into the innovative penal techniques within prisons would be better directed toward preventative measures outside of the fences, walls, or “farms.”

The second major way in which the farm and its inmates were agents in history quite possibly could be more important. The inmates had a profound effect on the local environment near the small community of Putnamville, Indiana. Much of the reason the penal farm was created near Putnamville was because of the rich and undisturbed

---

<sup>245</sup> The farm reported escapes, sometimes as high as thirty, in each annual report.

limestone deposits beneath the earth. This limestone was actually formed from the marine life that lived in the ocean covering parts of Indiana long, long ago. To use Richard White's semantics, the "energy" of this ocean and the life inside it was gradually transformed into something entirely different.<sup>246</sup> The waters of the ocean disappeared, and the marine life's remains were deposited all over the region. This marine life eventually converted into a mineral called calcite, which was later morphed along with the surrounding rock by the intense pressure of the earth above it into what we call limestone. Thousands of years later, this limestone would become incredibly valuable to humans. The energy that was once a part of an ocean did not disappear. It simply rearranged itself with the assistance of pressure and chemical reactions, and once the limestone formed, the energy sat there in yet another shape with an incredible amount of potential. With a couple of more million years, the limestone may have made yet another transformation into a metamorphic rock we call marble, but instead, humans interrupted the process.

Enter prisoners. Throughout history, humans have organized themselves into various systems of social organization. A social organization has a plethora of purposes, but those include the advancement of mass survival, the arrangement of humans into a division of labor, and most important for this study, the development of notions of right and wrong. Those humans who fail to follow the respective social organization's set of

---

<sup>246</sup> Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995). Much of White's work revolves around the idea of energy, particularly the energy surrounding the Columbia River. Before White's book, most of the coverage concerning the Columbia River approached the river's history as one of decline, with the actions of humans represented as those of destruction and thereby burdening the reader with a limited perception of nature. White proposes that the river was not necessarily destroyed, but simply changed. To White, human and nature cannot be separated--a history of one is not complete with the history of the other. Human labor merely modified the river's energy. The river and its human partners are now a part of an "organic machine" that is not necessarily better or worse than the original condition, just different.

norms are often punished through pain, incarceration, or death. By the year 1900, the humans living in a region called Indiana had settled, formed a government, farmed the land, developed some small industries, built roads and rails, and developed a fairly sophisticated system of incarceration with two adult-male state prisons, one in the northern part of the state and one in the southern, and a network of county jails. By 1913, the residents of Indiana deemed their jails inadequate, and they decided to create a more centrally governed prison for its minor criminals at Putnamville, Indiana. This decision would have profound effects.

The reform impulses of Hoosiers and actual inmates at the new prison contributed to a virtual explosion of energy. Throughout the farm's existence, thousands of humans (prisoners) were transported from all over the state to an otherwise relatively quiet and undisturbed geographic locale where they released their energies on the earth, and most notably, into the limestone beds which had lain uninterrupted for millions of years. In turn, the inmates released the energies of the marine life that had once lived there, and those remains were sent all over the state in the form of building material and agricultural fertilizer. On top of the limestone mining, the inmates severely altered the environment as they reclaimed land that was once barren and constructed buildings, dams, levees, lakes, roads, and rails. It is hard to imagine and measure the increased level of productivity in the area due to the decision to place the farm there. The inmates harvested an incredible amount of crops, raised and slaughtered thousands of animals, and made thousands of baskets, bricks, and pieces of furniture. Everything the inmates created came, in one way or another, from the land. Every year, hundreds of new hands would touch and alter the earth in this very vicinity. By 1960, 171,482 incarcerated men

had worked on the farm in some way.<sup>247</sup> Environmental historians recognize that history includes the history of humans as well as the environment, and the interaction between the two. The humans at the state farm interacted intensely with the local environment. It seems that the inmates who spent time at the farm were powerful historical agents indeed.

As illustrated earlier, the penal farm and its environment were unable to reform Indiana's misdemeanants, but interestingly enough, the inmates reformed the farm's environment considerably. The early farm administrators' philosophy about reciprocal reclamation turned out to be only one-sided, and in the least favorable way. Thousands of incarcerated men remained dreadfully the same even as the land they worked changed greatly. Such a phenomenon illustrates how a society's views about the environment can lead to unintended consequences.

The preceding discussion on the Indiana State Farm and its agency in the environmental history of the region may seem overkill to the traditional historian, but it is important to recognize that the inmates and their farm were not only subjects of a broad intellectual trend. If cause and effect are at all part of the object of history, the interaction between the inmates and the environment must be investigated. Both environmental-historical approaches--Hoosiers' views on nature and the inmates' effect on the local environment--are crucial in understanding why the penal farm came into being and what its consequences were.

For a great deal of its early history, Indiana was a land of small farmers and very much a part of the "garden" to which Henry Nash Smith referred. As this region entered

---

<sup>247</sup> *Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Indiana State Farm* (Putnamville: Indiana State Farm, 1960), 1.

the twentieth century, however, its residents knew their form of social organization would lean toward that of the East, making the idea of the garden even more significant. Hoosiers clung tightly to their roots, and the pastoral ideal lingered throughout the twentieth century.

This ideal is vital in understanding why Indiana created a penal farm. The state of Indiana did not create the farm simply to turn a profit. The state could have done that by employing prisoners in a single-product factory. No, the farm was conjured out of the thoughts of Hoosiers who had certain foundational conceptions about crime, labor, land, and environment. The minor offenders within the state would be removed from their dank, unproductive, and ineffective cells and placed in an ideal setting where, with any luck, social deviants would become truly rehabilitated.

Hoosiers of the early twentieth century liked the idea of building a community from the ground up, a process in which the previous few generations of Hoosiers had participated. Indiana was changing and the Hoosier way of life was no longer so simple; this is precisely why the model they chose for the state farm is so important. To the farm's creators and other Hoosiers, the inmates were supposed to re-enact the experience of a pioneer on what was mostly unused land. They were out in the open, working with their hands and molding nature into a productive "garden." The inmates would be able to take full advantage of the "fecundity" and "growth" that came along with the pastoral ideal.

Another remarkable characteristic about the farm, however, was the level of industry that was promoted at the farm in the form of a stone crushing plant and brick making. These industries eventually required most of the labor on the farm. Does this

negate the ideas about community and agriculture that went into the farm? Not exactly. Those who created and administered the farm knew from the beginning that more than agricultural work would have to be done in order to maintain the farm and employ the inmates. One of the reasons the penal farm commission chose the Putnamville site was because of its rich limestone deposits. Despite this fact, the language related to the open air, land, and nature continued. In essence, the state farm represented the best of both sides, almost a utopian compilation. It combined the pastoral ideal and modern day industrial technology to build the perfect self-sufficient community. One could say that Hoosiers at least partially accepted “the machine.”

The farm did not live up to its creators’ expectations, but despite this fact, the inmates dramatically modified the landscape and geography of the locale. The inmates introduced roads, railroads, levees, dams, and lakes to this relatively undeveloped region. They reclaimed the land at the farm, restoring its ability to grow fruit and crops once again. Thanks to the mass exodus of inmates from Indiana’s jails, the farm produced and consumed an incredible abundance of food, in the form of crops and farm animals, in quiet little Putnamville. The inmates opened to the world limestone beds that had lain untouched for millions of years, raising the interaction between human and the environment to a whole new level.

The history of the Indiana State Farm provides a considerable amount of insight into the American perception of the environment and prisoner’s role in that environment. On another level, however, the state farm’s transformation, or failure as some may call it, raises questions concerning the fate of its creators’ farm ideal. Does the transformation of the state farm, with the eventual construction of fences and towers, parallel

Americans' changing views about nature, community, and the farmer? Or is it simply a result of new penology or economic necessity? The answers to these questions are not clear, but the fact remains: The institution that now stands at Putnamville with nearly 2,500 semi-idle inmates at any one time is very different than the one imagined by the farm's architects.



## **Conclusion**

Between 1870 and 1920, the breakdown of antiquated ideas concerning the criminal, the prison, and the state allowed for the rise of a new penology that, among its many other consequences, provided a more humane environment for the inmate, placed more emphasis on inmate education and skill-building, and set the state's prisons down a path leading to the complex modern system we know today. The rising numbers of inmates and the occasional reports of cruelty and corruption certainly point to the failure of Hoosier reforms, but the very worst of Indiana's prison troubles, usually associated with political patronage or private-sphere exploitation, were curbed enough to leave room for meaningful action. In outlining Indiana penology in terms of punishment, sentencing, science, education, labor, and even nature, the previous three chapters have shown that Hoosiers possessed a distinct sense of urgency in dealing with their criminals and were willing to resort to innovative methods to correct the state's prison problems.

Since that period of substantial change, Indiana's prison system, like the prison systems of most states, has grown into an enormous and inflexible creature composed of a network of private and public "correctional facilities," whose purpose, despite their large number of educational programs, is largely custodial. Many of Indiana's prisons have an inmate census that greatly exceeds the capacity for which they were built, an occurrence that can only hinder the manageability and rehabilitation of the state's inmates. It seems that the primary push for change comes in the desire to cut short-term costs. The rise of the private prison brings to the table some interesting problems and questions. The recent (April 2007) riot at New Castle Correctional Facility, a private prison in New Castle, Indiana, has shown the limits of private prison management and the

interstate trade of inmates. Furthermore, the very notion of a private prison, in essence a self-sustaining and profit-driven business, brings into question the assumed ultimate goal of those concerned with social deviance, that is, to do away with criminality and eventually the prison itself.

David Rothman's question as to whether institutions can "allow for the development of alternatives" becomes increasingly relevant.<sup>248</sup> If institutions indeed hinder change, the ever growing prison systems of Indiana and other states can only serve more to block the possibility of true reform. The seemingly creative prison reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite their success in providing a more humane environment for inmates, worked well to expand the prison system and, in turn, the role of the state. The activity of Progressive Era prison reformers may well have led to the general complacency in prison-related affairs today.

Nevertheless, the desire for advancement and the experimental attitude of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century prison reformers and administrators are certainly things to be admired, and their accomplishments should testify not only to their sincerity and determination, but also to the tumultuous social conditions that prevailed as the United States quickly industrialized, urbanized, and grew in population. On the state level, Progressive Era Indiana faced the problems of the previous one hundred years and molded a new, workable prison system based on new and creative ideas. The challenge for those of us who march into the twenty-first century is to creatively use what we've learned in the almost one hundred years that now separate us from the Progressive Era

---

<sup>248</sup> David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 13.

and mold a new penology that perhaps works outside existing institutions, most notably, the prison.

## **Bibliography**

### **Archival Sources**

Annual Reports of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory, 1907-1920, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Annual Reports of the Indiana State Farm, 1915-1960, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Annual Reports of the Officers and Directors of Indiana State Prison North, 1870-1894, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Annual Reports of the Officers and Directors of Indiana State Prison South, 1870-1896, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Annual Reports of the Officers and Directors of Indiana State Prison, 1907-1920, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Biannual Reports of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory, 1897-1906, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Biannual Reports of the Officers and Directors of Indiana State Prison North, 1895-1906, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Papers of Amos Butler, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Papers of Governor James P. Goodrich, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana

Papers of Governor Thomas R. Marshall, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana

Papers of Governor Winfield T. Durbin, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana

Records of Committee on Penal and Reformatory Institutions, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana

Records of State Committee on Prison Labor, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana

Records of the Indiana Board of State Charities, Indiana State Archives and Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

Records of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

## **Government Reports**

U.S. Census Bureau

*1990 Census of Population and Housing: 1990 Population and Housing Unit Counts: United States*

*Population Division Working Paper No. 27: Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990*

## **Newspapers and Periodicals**

*Greencastle Herald-Democrat*, 1915, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

*Indianapolis Journal*, 1898-1940, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

*Indianapolis News*, 1898-1940, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

*Indianapolis Star*, 1898-1960, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

*The Reflector*, 1903-1908, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana

## **Selected Secondary Sources**

Adamson, Christopher R. "Punishment after Slavery: Southern State Penal Systems, 1865-1890." *Social Problems* 30, no. 5 (1983): 555-69.

Ayers, Edward. *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Banka, Harrie J. *State Prison Life: By One Who Has Been There*. Cincinnati: C.F. Vent, 1871.

Binder, Guyora. "Penal Reform and Progressive Ideology." *Reviews in American History* 9, no. 2 (1981): 224-32.

Butler, Amos. "Some Families as Factors in Anti-Social Conditions." *Economics, Genetics and the Family* I (1923): 385-95.

Carey, James L. "A History of the Indiana Penitentiary System, 1821-1933." Dissertation, Ball State University, 1966.

Christianson, Scott. *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1998.

- Colvin, Mark. *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs: Social Theory and the History of Punishment in Nineteenth-Century America*. St. Martin's, 1997.
- Dumm, Thomas L. *Democracy and Punishment: Disciplinary Origins of the United States*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.
- Evans, Sterling. "Entwined in Conflict: The South Dakota State Prison Twine Factory and the Controversy of 1919-1921." *South Dakota History* 35, no. 2 (2005): 95-124.
- Finzsch, Norbert and Robert Jütte, ed. *Institutions of Confinement: Hospitals, Asylums, and Prisons in Western Europe and North America, 1500-1950*. Publications of the German Historical Institute, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Gildemeister, Glen A. *Prison Labor and Convict Competition with Free Workers in Industrializing America, 1840-1890*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1987.
- Goldsmith, Larry. "History from the inside Out: Prison Life in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts." *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 1 (1997): 109-25.
- Hirsch, Adam Jay. *The Rise of the Penitentiary*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Hoffman, Leon. *A History of Blasted Hopes, Or Eleven Years in an Indiana State Prison*. Self-Published, 1904.
- Holliday, Murray. *A History of the Society of Indiana Pioneers, 1916-2005*. Indianapolis: Society of Indiana Pioneers, 2005.
- Hougen, Harvey R. "The Impact of Politics and Prison Industry on the General Management of the Kansas State Penitentiary, 1883-1909." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (1977): 297-318.
- Jach, Theresa R. "Reform Versus Reality in the Progressive Era Texas Prison." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 4, no. 1 (2005): 53-67.
- Justice, Benjamin. "'A College of Morals': Educational Reform at San Quentin Prison, 1880-1920." *History of Education Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2000): 279-301.
- Kann, Mark E. *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early Republic*. New York: New York University Press: London, 2005.
- Keve, Paul W. *Prisons and the American Conscience: A History of U.S. Federal Corrections*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991.

- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- McKay, Joyce. "Reforming Prisoners and Prisons: Iowa's State Prisons—The First Hundred Years." *Annals of Iowa* 60, no. 2 (2001): 139-73.
- McKelvey, Blake. *American Prisons: A History of Good Intentions*. Montclair, N.J.: P. Smith, 1977.
- Mennel, Robert M. "'The Family System of Common Farmers': The Origins of Ohio's Reform Farm. Part 1: 1840-1858." *Ohio History* 89, no. 2 (1980): 125-56.
- Mennel, Robert M. "'The Family System of Common Farmers': The Origins of Ohio's Reform Farm. Part 2: 1858-1884." *Ohio History* 89, no. 3 (1980): 279-322.
- Meranze, Michael. *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority, 1760-1835*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Miller, Vivien M. L. "Reinventing the Penitentiary: Punishment in Florida, 1868-1923." *American Nineteenth Century History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 82-106.
- Morris, Norval and David Rothman, ed. *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Pisciotta, Alexander W. *Benevolent Repression: Social Control and the American Reformatory-Prison Movement*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.
- Rafter, Nicole Hahn. "Gender, Prisons, and Prison History." *Social Science History* 9, no. 3 (1985): 233-48.
- Resch, John Phillips. "Ohio Adult Penal System, 1850-1900: A Study in the Failure of Institutional Reform." *Ohio History* 81, no. 4 (1972): 236-62.
- Rothman, David J. *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1971.
- Rothman, David J. *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.
- Rule, Lucien. *The City of Dead Souls*. Louisville, KY: Kentucky Printshop, c1922.
- Sellin, Thorsten. "Penal Servitude: Origin and Survival." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 109, no. 5 (1965): 277-81.
- Skotnicki, Andrew. *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000.

- Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.
- Spierenburg, Pieter. "Punishment, Power, and History: Foucault and Elias." *Social Science History* 28, no. 4 (2004): 607-36.
- Stern, Alexandra Minna. "'We Cannot Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow's Ear': Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland," *Indiana Magazine of History* 103, no. 1 (2007): 6-35.
- White, Richard. *The Organic Machine*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.
- Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.
- Zimmerman, Jane. "The Penal Reform Movement in the South During the Progressive Era, 1890-1917." *The Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 4 (1951): 462-92.



## **Curriculum Vitae**

Perry R. Clark

### **Education**

Ph.D. Student, University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of History

Sept. 2007-Present

Major Field: United States History 1763-Present

Minor Field: Gilded Age and Progressive Era

Program: Work, Race, and Gender in the Urban World (WRGUW)

Advisor: Robert Johnston

M.A., Indiana University, Department of History

Earned at Indiana University—Purdue University at Indianapolis

Aug. 2005-May 2008

Major Field: United States History

Thesis Committee: Robert Barrows (Chair), Annie Gilbert Coleman, Jason Kelly

B.S., Indiana State University, School of Education

Aug. 2001-May 2005

Major: Social Science Education

Specialization: History, Economics, and Sociology

### **Fellowships, Honors, Awards**

History Doctoral Award, UIC, Sept. 2007-May 2011

Teaching Assistantship, IUPUI, Aug. 2006-May 2007

University Fellowship, IUPUI, Aug. 2005-May 2006

Graduated with Honors, Magna Cum Laude, ISU, May 2005

Licensed Secondary Educator, May 2005

Alumni Full-Tuition Scholarship, ISU, Fall 2001

### **Research and Training**

Thesis: "Barred Progress: Indiana Prison Reform, 1880-1920," Completed April 2008

Seminar Paper: "Pioneer Prisoners: Land and Nature at the Indiana State Farm"

Teaching Assistant for 4 semesters, Aug. 2006-Present

Courses Taught: U.S. History-Reconstruction to Present (IUPUI), First and  
Second Half of Western Civilization (UIC)

Student Teacher, Otter Creek M.S. and Northview H.S., Indiana, Jan. 2005-May 2005

Courses Taught: U.S. History (OCMS), Economics (NHS), Sociology (NHS)

Research Assistant for Professor Daniel Clark, ISU, Summer 2004

Volunteer Counselor, Ryves Hall Youth Center, 14<sup>th</sup> & Chestnut Comm. Center, Summer  
2004

**Academic Service**

Treasurer, History Graduate Society at UIC, 2007-2008

Member of Prospective Student Day Committee, UIC, 2008

Treasurer, History Graduate Student Association at IUPUI, 2006-2007

Volunteer, Midwest Conference on British Studies, Indianapolis, Oct. 2006

**Conferences Attended**

American Culture Association/Popular Culture Association National Joint Conference

April 2007 – Boston, MA

Paper Presented: “Pioneer Prisoners: Land and Nature at the Indiana State Farm”